Weird Tales

THE UNIQUE MAGAZINE

The SPIRIT FAKERS of HERMANNSTADT by

HOUDINI

The Most Miraculous True Story Ever Written

Mally

MARCH 1924 25¢

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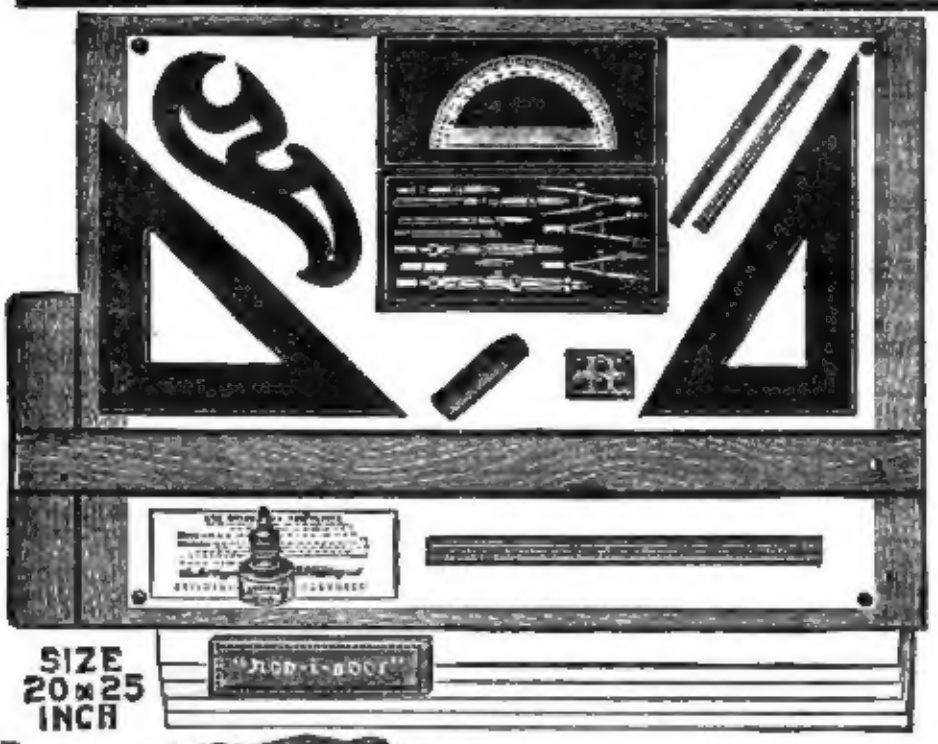

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A Beautiful Art Album of PERFECT MEN AND WOMEN *for* Lovers of the Body Beautiful

All lovers of the body beautiful will be delighted with this beautiful ART ALBUM, containing 120 glorious pictures of perfect men and women physical culturists. All the beauties of muscular development in men and all the glory and grace of the perfect contours of the best known women physical culturists are illustrated in this Album. It is indeed an art masterpiece, and no lover of the glories of the human body will want to be without it.

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The following is a list of the athletes, physical culturists, and artists' models who posed for the pictures:

ATHLETIC CHAMPIONS

Ethelda Bleibtrey(several poses).
Charlotte Boyle.
Ida Schnall (several poses).
George F. Jowett.
Bernard Bernard (several poses).
Charlie Postl.
Ray Johnson.
Marie Curtis
Edward Aston.
George Dimbinski.
Laura Bennett.
Mary Jane Lowe
Carrie Keeley.
Marion Fletcher.
Nursie King.
John G. Paine.
Charles Shaffer.
Al. Treloar.
Maurice Deriaz.
Hilda Curtis.
Strangler Lewis.
David Willoughby.
Al. Bevan.
Maxick.
Walter Klee.
Stanislaus Zbyszko.
Captain Johns (several poses).
Ottley R. Coulter.
Antone Matysek.
Sybil Bauer.
Joie Ray.
George Calza (several poses).
Arthur Saxon.
S. V. Bacon.
E. H. Bacon.
Sergeant Swimmer.
Joe Stecher.
Jack Dempsey.
Mark Jones.
Arthur F. Gay
Marin Plestina.

PHYSICAL CULTURISTS

Mrs. Earle Liederman —(Miss Alaska) (several poses).
J. Richmond (several poses).
Earle Liederman.
Charles Atlas (several poses).
Dorothy Knapp (several poses).
Kathleen O'Connor.
Olive Ann Alcorn.
Lionel Strongfort.
Jovita Dardon.
Helen Chadwick.
Joe Bonomo.
Madge Merritt.
Marjorie Barker.
Rev. B. E. Brown.
Gladys Walton.
Priscilla Dean.
Dr. C. B. Severn.
John M. Hernic.
A. P. Hedlund.
Mrs. Hedlund (several poses).
Rose Kinder.
Polly Walker.
Doris Wilson.
The Vanities.
Ann. Hyatt.

ARTISTIC

Strength and Beauty.
Les Syrenes.
Salammbo and Mattho.
A Study of the Nude.
The Slaves.
The Vine.
The Sundial.
Ecstasy.
Consolation.
Le Baiser.
The Tempest.
Rising Woman.
Braccio Nuovo.
L'Aurore et Cephalie.
Apollo.
Energy in Repose.
Psyche Receives the First Kiss of Love.
The March of Love.
Beauty and Development.
Climbing up the Cliff.
Hail to Life.
Bacchante.
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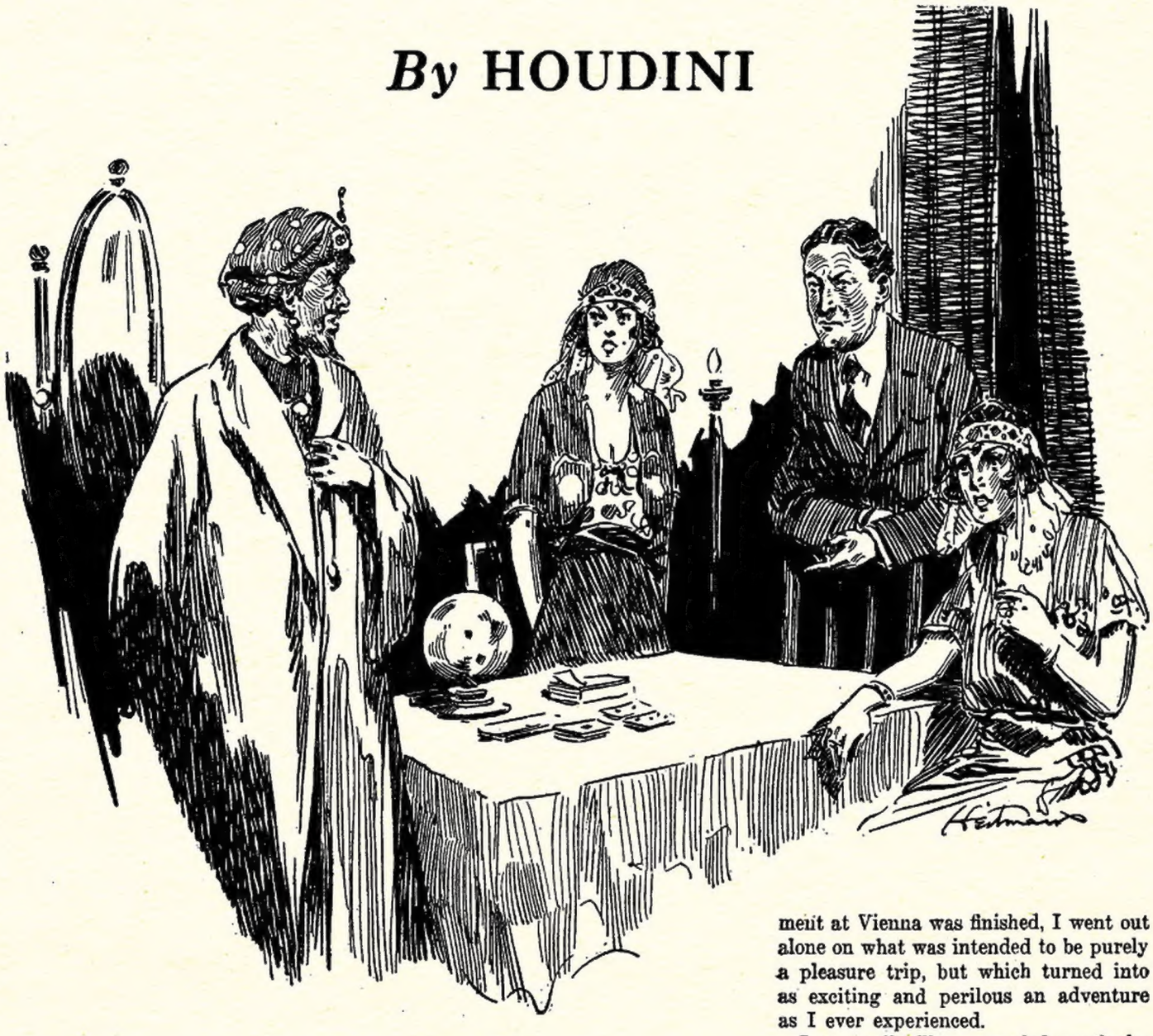
THE SPIRIT FAKERS OF HERMANNSTADT

An Amazing Adventure of Houdini

By HOUDINI



I HAVE been in many tight places in my varied life; I have met dangers in the most surprising forms; but I have never experienced anything more perilous and weird than when I was held captive by a group of unprincipled blackmailers in an old castle in Transylvania, on the banks of the Maros River, in what was at that time part of Hungary but was later given to Rumania in the settlement that followed the World War.

This adventure came to me most unexpectedly, with no hint of its dangerous character until I was fully drawn into it. I had been exhibiting my skill in various cities of Europe, and had just finished an engagement at Roanachers establishment in Vienna, mystifying the spectators by escaping from a triple-locked trunk into which I had been thrown manacled. I wanted to see a little of the picturesque country along the Maros River, so, after my engagement at Vienna was finished, I went out alone on what was intended to be purely a pleasure trip, but which turned into as exciting and perilous an adventure as I ever experienced.

In a small village, peopled mostly by Rumanians, although it was in Hungary, I stayed overnight with a grocer's family, amusing the children, as well as their parents, by several little tricks of parlor magic. They must have noised abroad that a magician was stopping with them, for when I was about to depart, the next morning, a heavily veiled woman came to see me, and asked for me by name.

Wondering how the woman knew who I was, I received her in the little living

room which the family placed at my disposal.

"Mr. Houdini," she said, speaking in the Magyar tongue, "I am in great distress, and you have it in your power to help me. Will you do so?"

"Madam," I replied, "if you will state your trouble, frankly and clearly, I will see what can be done."

She was visibly agitated, and her body trembled, but the black veil hid her features. After a minute she regained her composure.

"First I must ask you," she said, "whether you believe in spiritualism?"

I was frankly astonished at her question.

"What bearing has this on the matter?" I countered.

"If you are a spiritualistic medium, then I am lost indeed," she replied. "Do you employ the spirits of the dead in your work?"

I smiled.

"On that score you can reassure yourself," I replied. "In all my escapes from handcuffs and trunks and jails, in fact in everything I do, I use nothing of that sort. As for spiritualism, I neither believe nor disbelieve in it. There may be honest mediums, but so far I have never met one, nor have I ever established communication with the dead. Does that answer your question?"

"Thank heaven," exclaimed my visitor. "I am the Countess—"

She hesitated a minute, then resumed, somewhat incoherently:

"I am the Countess D—, but I must ask you to respect my confidences because the honor of our house depends upon it. I would not come for help to you, a stranger, except that a disaster impends which only you can avert. Unknown to you, your name and influence have been used by an unprincipled gang of blackmailers in an attempt to extort secrets from my younger sister, Rosicka. My father was a very terrible man, Mr. Houdini. Only I and my sister and an old deaf-mute caretaker know the fearful secrets of Castle D—. If those secrets were related to the world we would be shunned by all decent people and my own hopes of happiness in this world would be killed. I am affianced to a man whom I love deeply but he would never marry me, the daughter of such a line, if he knew the terrible secrets of our castle. Yet I am in no way tainted with my father's crimes, for I inherit my mother's face and traits. My sister inherits from my father his strength of will and his stubborn determination, but in features and character she too is like my mother, who was all sweetness. Look upon my features, Mr. Houdini, and then say whether you could believe that I am the daughter of one of the most degenerate and opprobrious villains that ever drew the breath of life."

She threw back her veil, and I caught a glimpse of beauty and tender loveliness that made my breath come short. There was in her dark black eyes such a pleading wistfulness that I could not help feeling sorry for her; and though I did not know what she expected or wanted of me, I made up my mind then and there that I would aid her in every way in my power. She gazed at me thus for so many minutes that I became uneasy.

HOUDINI, the internationally famous mystifier, who has baffled the public, the shrewdest police and the leading scientists of this and other countries for the past twenty years, herewith presents a story of his adventure never before recorded. It is with pleasure that the publishers of this magazine are able to announce that more stories of the adventures of Houdini will appear in succeeding issues, none of which have ever before appeared in print.

Houdini has always been profoundly interested in spiritualistic and psychic phenomena. He has personally known most of the leading spiritualists of the last thirty years and, strange to say, they are all intensely interested in Houdini from the fact that Houdini has never failed to duplicate any feat of so-called spiritualistic phenomena. He has never been able to discover one solitary fact that would convince him of spirit communication and years ago he made solemn compacts with fourteen of his closest friends that the one first to die would communicate with the survivor, through an agreed signal. The fourteen have passed on and Houdini still awaits their messages in respectful seriousness.

Volumes could be written of the various feats performed by this Master of Escape. Most of them are well known to practically every one who has seen Houdini in his numerous appearances before the American public. No man living today could equal Houdini in assembling a crowd if it were announced that Houdini would attempt one of his miraculous escapes. But Houdini has had some remarkable adventures and has effected some desperate escapes that were not advertised beforehand. He has traveled to every nook and corner of the globe and in his note book are recorded some of his personal experiences in different climes that if one were not acquainted with the ability of the man, would sound like fiction of the most imaginative sort. Some of these personal experiences will appear in future issues of WEIRD TALES. *They will deal with revengeful crooks who have been exposed by Houdini and who literally stopped at no means to be revenged on him. They will set forth the extreme measures resorted to by avaricious scoundrels in their attempts to wrest from Houdini the secrets that have made him so famous. They will tell of traps set for him with all the skill and cunning, ingenious minds could contrive.*

Houdini is a lover of books and has the finest collection of psychic, spiritualistic and dramatic works of any man in America. He has just completed a new book on the subject of fraudulent spiritualistic phenomena, "A Magician Among the Spirits" (Harper & Bro.) and has written quite a few volumes on various subjects. He is so well known that the latest Funk & Wagnalls' dictionary published the word "HOUDINIZE—to get out of or escape."

Dr. Frank Crane, in his syndicated daily editorials, commented recently on Houdini. "He is one of the most remarkable men of his time. He is not only a famous magician, but he has a most extraordinary equipment of mind and body. He is one of the most perfect and efficient bodies in the world—a very shrewd and resourceful mind. Men like Houdini help along a good deal in the sanity of the world by showing the public that most of the hocus-pocus put forward by people who claim to be assisted by spirits and by magic are nothing but clever tricks."

In another page of this magazine will appear an announcement that Houdini will answer any rational question regarding spiritualistic or psychic phenomena and such questions and answers that seem of general interest will be published in this magazine from time to time.—THE EDITOR.

"Come, Madam," I said at last, "reassure yourself. I give you my word that I will help you, and you can trust me absolutely not to reveal your confidences. But I cannot imagine anything your father could have done so terrible that it would cause anyone to hate so fair and sympathetic a woman as you."

"Ah, you little know," she breathed.

Then, with her head bowed in shame and her eyes averted from mine, she told a tale of depravity so terrible that my brows knitted in loathing, and I involuntarily clenched my fists in fierce anger to think that such creatures as this woman's father could ever exist on this fair earth of ours. I even included her in my intense loathing, as her voice broke and trailed off incoherently in the midst of the most revolting details. But when she raised her eyes again, and I saw the horror and fear in them, a great wave of pity surged over me for the unfortunate daughter of a man who could wreak such terrible barbarities upon innocent peasant girls within the dungeons of his castle.

What she told me that night I am under oath never to reveal, and I cannot violate that oath. If I said that her father was a beast in human form, I would be insulting the whole animal order of creation. He was far worse, far lower, than any beast. His daughter's narrative told of the disappearance of women and young girls in the blackness of night, and how the Count had organized searching parties to fool the peasants into believing that he was earnestly trying to find the women and girls who had disappeared, whereas these poor creatures in the dungeons of his castles were undergoing—but I must not forget my oath. Suffice it to say that the mother of the Count's two daughters died from shame and terror, and the two girls (my fair visitor and her sister Rosicka), learning from the ravings of their dying father the truth that they already half suspected, shut themselves off in part of the castle and lived apart from the world, until recently, when they had gone to Hermannstadt, where love entered the life of my visitor, the Countess D—.

"You see well, Mr. Houdini," the Countess continued, "that all my dreams of love and happiness will be over if these terrible secrets are found out. They must remain locked in the breasts of myself and my sister Rosicka, to be buried forever in the grave when we die. Surely no man, no matter how much he might love me, could consent to link his name and family to a line accursed by such a beast as my father, the Count D—. And yet he bore a good name during his life, and his memory is respected, though I cannot hope for his happiness now that he is dead."

It was on the tip of my tongue to remark that nobody could refuse to forgive one so lovely for sins committed by her ancestors. But the full horror of the story she had just told me caused me to shudder, and I remained silent.

"Three months ago," said the Countess D—, "my sister met, in Hermannstadt, a noblewoman who was deeply interested in spiritualism. She took my sister to several seances, and introduced her to a medium named Popkens. This medium has converted her completely to spiritualism, and he is using his influence to get from her the secrets that would ruin our line.

"Four days ago she brought him to our castle, which stands on the banks of the Maros River two leagues from here. The moment I saw him, I knew that I had seen him before—dark, with small, beady eyes that show a great deal of white; nervous hands with long fingers; a thin, foppishly curled black mustache; and a horrible manner of repeatedly plucking at his beaklike chin with his left hand. There is something sinister about the man. *I know that I have seen him before, and in the very castle itself, while my father was still alive.* Who he is and what he knows, it is beyond my power to say, but I am certain that I have seen him before, and that he is diabolical. If I could only place him definitely, I know I could convince my sister that he is an impostor who purposes nothing good.

"In the last seance that my sister attended in Hermannstadt, she says, he went into a trance, and my father's spirit spoke through Popken's lips, in my father's very voice, commanding her to release his soul from torment by putting into writing the whole revolting hideousness of his evil deeds on earth, as my sister had heard it from the dying lips of my conscience-tortured father in that terrible delirium that preceded his death—the terrified ravings of a fiend trying to make his peace with God before he dies. As only my sister and I and the deaf-mute caretaker attended him in his final illness, my sister is satisfied that it was really our father's spirit speaking to her. He ordered her to write out clearly and legibly everything he had told her in his delirium, and sign it in the presence of two other persons who would be named by him in a later seance.

"Of course Rosicka refused. She would take no commands from the father whose memory she loathes, but she was greatly worried. Then last night this false medium, Popkens (for I am sure that he is an unprincipled impostor and adventurer), held a seance in the castle itself, which I attended. He claimed to produce the spirit of our saintly mother. The apparition commanded Rosicka to rescue our father from torment by yielding to his wishes, and it named two men who are to witness the affidavit of my sister. As a sign that she was indeed the spirit of our mother, speaking to us from beyond the grave, she said that she had appeared to these two witnesses in dreams, and *they were even now on their way from Hermannstadt to witness the document that my sister Rosicka was to write,* although our mother's spirit had not informed them what the document was.

"The voice was indeed like that of our mother, but there was also a difference. It was that difference which prevented Rosicka from then and there going into her bedroom and spending the rest of the night writing out the fragmentary record of my father's depravities—a record that would cause the countryside to rise against us, and mean the ending of my dream of happiness, if indeed we escaped with our lives from those whose daughters and sisters suffered from the unbelievable debaucheries perpetrated by my father.

"The apparition of our mother, appearing dimly in the darkened room like a wraith of mist, adjured my sister that she had no right to condemn even the worst of sinners to eternal torment, and his torment would be unending unless a record were left that might be discovered by future generations to expose his shame to the world, so that his spirit could atone. Such a written record of his misdeeds would jeopardize Rosicka's happiness, said the voice, for after the document was duly witnessed she was to bury it behind a certain stone in the famous black dungeon. I knew what was meant by the black dungeon, where in medieval times terrible tortures were inflicted, and I cringed helplessly at the thought of ever going down into that den of iniquity, last visited by my father, whose death was caused by poisoning from the bite of the insane girl he kept shackled there.

"But with that thought, sudden light came in upon me. This man, this fake medium, whom I am certain I had once seen in the castle, knew of the dungeon, knew of my father's crimes, and wanted to lay his hands upon the evidence. The men on their way from Hermannstadt to witness the document are his accomplices. They aim to obtain the document out of the dungeon, after Rosicka has put it there, and then blackmail us out

of everything we have, for they know that both Rosicka and I would give up everything and go penniless into the world before we would suffer the ignominy of being branded by the depravities of our father. The false medium, Popkens, professes to know nothing about what happened during his trance, but that is only to convince my sister that the communications she has received are really from our father and our mother. How Popkens knows anything about my father's crimes, or about the delirium that preceded his death, I do not yet know, unless he is really a spiritualistic medium. In that case his dealings are with bad spirits intent upon the ruin of myself and my sister.

"Be that as it may, my sister says that if the two witnesses from Hermannstadt arrive today, as the apparition of our mother prophesied, then she will believe that she has received a solemn command from our mother and will prepare a record of our father's guilt. There is no earthly way, she says, by which the witnesses could be informed to come to Castle D—. Popkens, she says, was in a trance and knows nothing of the communication from our mother, and even had he been conscious he has no means of sending messages to Hermannstadt, and he has not left the castle since the seance. But if Rosicka prepares this paper, then we are lost, for it will fall into the hands of the unscrupulous Popkens.

"When I chanced to come to the village this morning to post a letter to our solicitor in Hermannstadt begging him to hasten to my aid, I heard that a man was here who performed tricks of magic, and from their nature I knew that it must be you. Popkens, one week ago, took Rosicka to see you perform, when my sister was in Hermannstadt. Rosicka has told me that you are really a great spiritualistic medium, that you make supernatural escapes, by spirit aid, although you claim to do your tricks by your own skill, the better to excite the admiration of the public. I asked my sister how she knew this, and she said that Popkens had told her so. He also told her that you were once his pupil in developing your mediumistic powers. My sister saw you shackled and manacled and thrown into a trunk on the stage at Vienna, and the trunk was then locked and bound around with stout rope. A canopy was then placed around the trunk, to conceal your operations from the audience, and soon you emerged from the canopy, having made your escape. It seemed impossible for any man to perform such a feat by human means, Rosicka said, but Popkens explained to her that you had learned how to project your spirit double, and that it was only your spirit double that went into the trunk, and that you simply materialized yourself and again became visible to the audience. My sister believed implicitly in the medium's explanation."

At this point in the narrative of the Countess I interrupted rather heatedly.

"It is not true," I said. "I am not a medium, and I do not make my escapes by any such means."

"I believe you," the Countess went on, "and that is just what I want you to tell Rosicka. She has seen you. She knows you by sight. If you will go with me to Castle D— at once, we shall arrive before the accomplices from Hermannstadt get there. Tell Rosicka that you are not a medium. Tell her that Popkens is a liar and an impostor. She will believe you, and the secrets of our line will then be locked within our own bosoms, and yours (for I have revealed to you all of my father's secrets that I know, sparing nothing), and these secrets will perish when we perish. The noble line of D— will continue, and the happiness which I seek so desperately and so selfishly will be secured. It is little that I ask, Mr. Houdini, but it means everything to me, and I shall pay you well."

She held out her hands imploringly, and her eyes searched deep into mine. I told her that I could not accept her money for a favor which I was only too glad to confer.

We got into a rather dilapidated calash, and started for the castle. The Countess explained that she drove it herself because she wanted nobody at the castle to know of her excursion to the village; and in any case she had only the deaf-mute to call upon, for they lived very simply in a small part of the castle, with but two other servants, who were man and wife, and did all the cooking and took care of the house.

After a drive of slightly more than an hour, we came to Castle D— on the banks of the Maros River. The old moat was empty, except for a stagnant scum that showed the presence of an inch or two of water; and the castle itself had been badly neglected. One wall of the castle abutted directly upon the river, which washed its base. The grounds were well kept, with smooth lawns and carefully trimmed shrubs and a profusion of roses, testifying to the loving care of the old deaf-mute. The old man saluted as the calash rolled up the dirt road, and then assisted the Countess to get down from the vehicle.

We went directly into the drawing room, and the Countess at once introduced me to her sister Rosicka, who was talking with a dark-skinned and evil-featured man whom I rightly guessed to be Popkens, the medium.

I shall never forget the surprise and consternation with which he heard my name fall from the lips of the Countess. Anger, intense and overwhelming, showed on his face for an instant, and then passed completely away. He forced a broad smile to his lips, and extended his hand in greeting.

"Ah, Mr. Houdini," he exclaimed in passable English, "what a pleasure to meet you here! You don't remember me, do you?"

I had never laid eyes on the man before that minute. The brazen effrontery of his greeting disgusted me. I refused the proffered handshake, and, looking him straight in the eyes, I told him:

"Mr. Popkens, your game is up. You are a faker and an impostor, and you have told Miss Rosicka things about me that are not true. I am here to expose you before you have succeeded in your blackmailing schemes."

Popkens' smile became even more broad, and, turning to Rosicka, he exclaimed in Magyar, so rapidly that I could not understand all of what he said to her:

"You see, he knows me. This is the great spiritualist of whom we were talking, who used to be my pupil."

"You are lying to that girl," I exclaimed in English, my temper showing in my face.

"Well, well, my dear Mr. Houdini," he replied, in English, rubbing his hands together, "we shall talk this over at our leisure. If you will allow me, I should like to talk this little matter over with you alone in another room. It will be to your advantage," he added, a menacing glint in his eyes belying the broadness of his smile.

"No, I will talk right now, in Magyar, before these two women," I said, and turned to Rosicka.

Popkens stood for just a minute, until I had launched into my explanation. Then suddenly he leaped upon my back and threw his arms about my head, trying to bend it back and choke me. I was taken off my guard by the suddenness of the attack, and went down in a heap. I quickly shook my assailant from my shoulders, and with a smashing blow to the chin I sent him reeling to the wall. Unfortunately he was not alone, for from the window he had seen the arrival of his accomplices from Hermannstadt before he leaped upon me.

(*Continued on page* 80)

This Uncanny Tale of Creeping Horror Will Hold You Spellbound

THE HERMIT OF GHOST MOUNTAIN

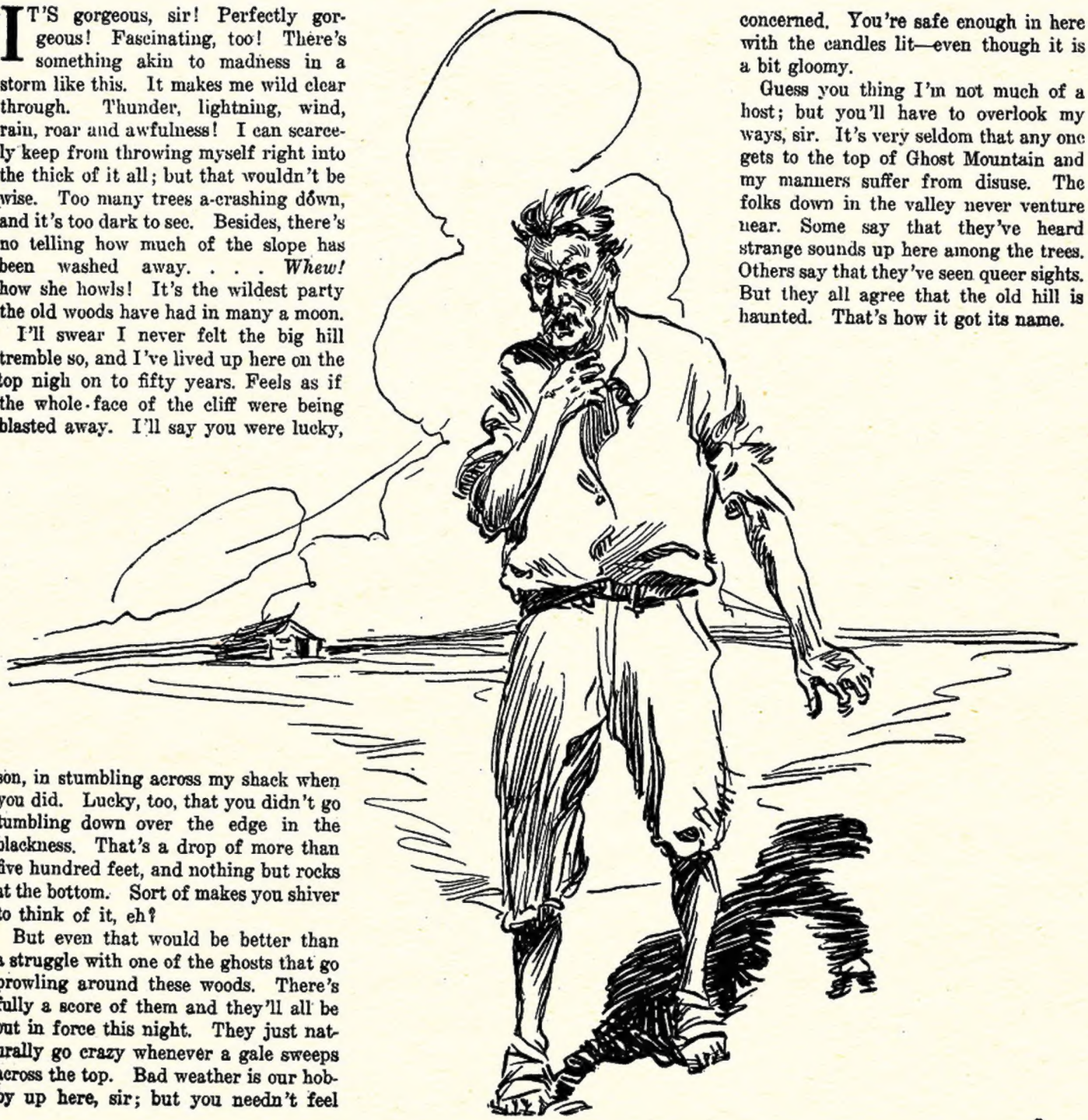
By C. FRANKLIN MILLER

IT'S gorgeous, sir! Perfectly gorgeous! Fascinating, too! There's something akin to madness in a storm like this. It makes me wild clear through. Thunder, lightning, wind, rain, roar and awfulness! I can scarcely keep from throwing myself right into the thick of it all; but that wouldn't be wise. Too many trees a-crashing down, and it's too dark to see. Besides, there's no telling how much of the slope has been washed away. . . . *Whew!* how she howls! It's the wildest party the old woods have had in many a moon.

I'll swear I never felt the big hill tremble so, and I've lived up here on the top nigh on to fifty years. Feels as if the whole face of the cliff were being blasted away. I'll say you were lucky, son, in stumbling across my shack when you did. Lucky, too, that you didn't go tumbling down over the edge in the blackness. That's a drop of more than five hundred feet, and nothing but rocks at the bottom. Sort of makes you shiver to think of it, eh?

But even that would be better than a struggle with one of the ghosts that go prowling around these woods. There's fully a score of them and they'll all be out in force this night. They just naturally go crazy whenever a gale sweeps across the top. Bad weather is our hobby up here, sir; but you needn't feel concerned. You're safe enough in here with the candles lit—even though it is a bit gloomy.

Guess you thing I'm not much of a host; but you'll have to overlook my ways, sir. It's very seldom that any one gets to the top of Ghost Mountain and my manners suffer from disuse. The folks down in the valley never venture near. Some say that they've heard strange sounds up here among the trees. Others say that they've seen queer sights. But they all agree that the old hill is haunted. That's how it got its name.



According to an old story, Ghost Mountain was once the retreat for a band of outlaws who terrorized the country for miles around. Finally they got to fighting among themselves and killed each other off. According to the story, that fight is still raging and can be seen and heard during a storm like this if any one is bold enough to venture up the slope.

Some mighty peculiar thefts have occurred down there in the valley. I've heard it said that food, drugs and chemicals were the articles sought; but, strangely enough, the robbers have never been apprehended. The stolen goods have never been found. That is why the folks down there insist that the ghosts of the outlaws are still operating.

Hm! Perhaps that's why you're up here tonight? Wanted to see those ghosts for yourself, eh? Reporter—maybe? You've got the grit, son. It was a bold move.

Ah! Bold blood! This is gorgeous. You came just in time, sir. Yes—yes. indeed! Science can make use of you.

But, here! Slip off those sopping clothes and crawl into this blanket. I'll put another log on the fire. Your things will soon be dry. . . . Come on, son, you might as well. You won't be able to venture out, anyway, until the storm has gone down. . . .

There, you look real comfortable now. We can't let your blood get chilled. That would be unpardonable! I'll pour out a drink that will warm you up. Guess you need it after that soaking. . .

It's a pretty color, isn't it, son? Good stuff, too! Yes—it does look like blood, but what if it is? I've swallowed some viler liquids with the same color in my time and they were called wine. Come—what's in a name! No? Well, I like it. It's such a beautiful red. Mighty nourishing, too, especially if it's fresh.

When I was younger there was nothing to me but skin and bones. I wasn't expected to live. Someone suggested that I drink a quart of ox blood every day. At first it was worse than any medicine; but that was only a queer idea. I grew to like it. It made me immensely strong in time.

Look at me, son! You would never guess that I was a puny weakling at one time. You might not believe that I've passed the century mark in age. This gray head of mine has gone uncovered through more than a hundred winters and I haven't known sickness in years. That is my secret, son. Maybe I'll tell it to you. . . .

Listen! Do you hear that wailing? Sounds like wind in the trees, but it's not. That's the ghost of Jerry McFadden. I know them all—I ought—and he's the wildest one in the lot. Always comes prowling around at this hour, whether the moon shines or not, and starts his wailing.

Jerry was as strong as an ox and no more intelligent. Just a hopeless idiot. There was nothing courageous about him; he simply didn't know enough to keep out of danger. But he had strong blood. That was his redeeming feature. Strong blood! So I used him!

He hates me like poison. Sets a lot of traps to get me, but I'm wise in the ways of ghosts. He tries to creep into my brain whenever I'm off guard and make me do things which might cause death. Sounds unusual for an idiot; but they do say that death is a wonderful healer. Why, whenever I get near the Now you'll hear a sobbing that will just urging me to jump. But I always manage to fight him off. . . .

Whew! What a crash! Seems to be getting worse outside. My toes are tingling yet from the shock. Felt as though it split the old hill right in two. Now you'll hear a sobbing that will just about wring your heart. Over here under the window on the outside. Hear it?

Poor little Nina! A perfect beauty in her time—and young. Young blood! Just another martyr to science. She's scared to death of thunder and always comes a-crying whenever the noise is especially piercing. I was hoping that Jerry would be able to comfort her, but it seems he is too busy watching me.

BUT about Jerry—I didn't finish, did I? I killed him! Now don't look that way. This was years ago when the big idea first dawned. . . . Why, you aren't afraid, are you, son? Of course, not! Bold blood can't be scared.

Everybody down in the valley knows that I killed Jerry. At least I've told them; but they won't believe me. They just wag their heads and smile. Some tap their temples with their fingers as if to say that I've gone mad. Fools!

I killed Jerry, and that is the truth. Nothing could be plainer. In some way or other he wandered into the shack and was a-sitting right there where you are when I first saw him. I had been experimenting for some time—years, in fact—and when I saw his powerful frame the big idea came to me in a flash. Strong blood!

I plunged my knife straight through his heart and turned it round and round. He squealed like a stuck pig and bled just as much. Yes, Jerry was a husky ox!

Did you ever see blood gush out of a dying heart, son? It's a gorgeous sight—and interesting! At first it shoots out thick and rich—like oil. It's a beautiful color. Jerry's was especially fine. Then it wells up fitfully for a spell and finally eases off into a tiny trickle. I'd like for you to see it, son. . . .

Jerry started his tricks from the very first. He made me feel scared for a spell. That is how I came to make the mistake I did. I thought I had to hide his body. So I drained him down in the work-shop and stuffed him underneath the bunk there . . . It was a mistake to keep it secret.

For days I could not rid my mind of that dead carcass. The thought kept me from sleeping, too. My nerves grew jumpy and violent pains began to knock in my head. It got so that I could see that body wherever I looked. I could feel its heart thumping and burning away at my back whenever I tried to lie in the bunk.

The time came when the beat of that heart never left me at all. It made no difference whether I was in the shack, or out in the woods, I could always hear its monotonous *thump—thump—thump*. It felt like a hammer knocking in my ears and I began to get dizzy spells. The horrible feeling possessed me that the beat of that heart was chipping off bits of my brain with each thump. I thought I was going mad.

But a madman cannot reason, son. Always remember that. I began to reason. What was it that troubled me? The heart of Jerry McFadden! And why? Because I was nursing an overpowering secret. The remedy was simple. I'd reveal my secret and smother the heart.

So I pulled out Jerry's body. His heart stuck like glue—Jerry hates me like poison!—but I managed to pry it loose. I sealed it in a bottle. Here it is. See! Quite a little thing to kick up such a rumpus. That hole in the center is where I turned the knife.

The smaller lump in there is the heart of little Nina. I thought she would be good company for Jerry, but he doesn't seem to pay much attention to her. He just wails around in the tree-tops while she cries outside the window there.

Listen! Do you hear them? Jerry can't be much of a ladies' man. He could at least be gallant on a night like this.

Are you sure you won't have a drink, son? You look as pale as a ghost. Remember, it's very strengthening. No?

Well, I hate to drink alone, but here's to you!

Yes, I bottled Jerry's heart and made my way down into the valley. They told me that a body had been fished out of the river and identified as Jerry's. No one would believe my story. They just smiled behind my back and whispered that the Hermit was going mad.

I suppose my tale did sound wild and, instead of jailing me, they pitied me. Someone even suggested that I come down in the valley to live. They didn't know it, but that was impossible. I had my work to do up here.

They thought Ghost Mountain was getting on my nerves. Funny—that! Why, son, I love this big, old hill and the more the ghosts the merrier. They understand me and I understand them—except for Jerry.

Are you smiling, sir? I saw the corners of your mouth twitch. Don't make the same mistake that the valley folk did. Don't be a fool!

No sooner had I bottled Jerry's heart than he started wailing—just like that! Hear him? I thought he wanted company. Nina was such a pretty little thing and I felt sure Jerry would be pleased.

I found her lying in the midst of an auto smashup near the bottom of the falls. She said her machine had hurdled the road at the top. She was badly jarred and her left leg was broken, but she had no serious injuries.

I carried her up here and tried to set the broken bone. She fainted. I wish you could have seen her then, son. She was a beautiful sight—and young. Young blood! So I used her.

I severed an artery in each wrist. I doubt if she ever knew what had happened. But I didn't make the same mistake as I had with Jerry. Only a fool would do that. I dug out her heart while it was still warm and put it in the bottle there.

Again those fools down below refused to believe me. They found her machine where I had left it and said that her body was caught among the rocks deep under the surface where no one could get at it—because of the force of the stream pouring over the side.

I and my tales were beginning to be a joke. The Hermit of Ghost Mountain was surely mad, but perfectly harmless. He was simply too old to live alone.

That's why I don't bother them any more with my tales. I haven't been seen down there in years. Truth is stranger than fiction—and no one believes fiction. It is easier to believe a lie.

LISTEN! Do you hear that groaning—outside the door? That's the ghost of old Buck Weaver. He was old enough to die, anyway. Old Blood! Didn't have enough in his body to keep him warm. But what he had was useful. A little drop of old blood will go a long way, son!

You are smiling, sir—just like the rest. Fools! Fools! All of you! The day will come when the Hermit of Ghost Mountain will be famous. Then no one will smile. They'll call me a genius instead of mad. They'll live for centuries and revere my name. For I've unearthed that thing which the world has been seeking since the days of Ponce de Leon. I've discovered the Spring of Life!

You think I'm mad. I can see it in your eyes. Oh, you skeptics! You disbelievers! You've stood in the way of progress ever since the dawn of man. Even I had to steal away from your laughter and jeers and hide away among the phantoms of Ghost Mountain. A martyr to science! But in spite of your jeers I'll make you rich. I'll give you everlasting life!

Ah, that interests you, son! Always ready to live and enjoy—never ready to do and die. Bold blood takes all and gives nothing. Ha! Ha! This is gorgeous.

Listen! Granted the existence of food, air and water, which are the gifts of nature, what one thing is essential to human life? Arms? Legs? No! I can cut them off and you'll live. Your head? I can decapitate you. Your heart? I can dig it out. But what would then happen? You'd bleed and I wouldn't be able to stop the flow. As soon as you'd be drained your body would be useless. Why? Because you cannot live without blood. That is what life is dependent upon. *Blood!*

You see, I reason! And still you think I'm mad. A madman cannot reason, son. I've told you so before.

I like you, bold blood! Come, I'll show you the living proofs of my scientific statement. I keep them in my work-shop underneath. Better bring another candle. The place is always dark, and one won't be enough. Catch hold of the railing, son; these steps are mighty steep. . . . Careful!

Cold down here, isn't it? Keep that blanket wrapped about you. Your blood must not be chilled. . . . Guess it isn't necessary to start a fire. We won't be down here long.

You are the first to see this, son, and you'll find it mighty interesting. Instructive, too! I call it the Morgue of Life, for here lie the martyrs of life eternal. Some are only flesh and bones. That is why their ghosts keep prowling around, like wailing Jerry. . . . Some are still living, but I keep them drugged. There is no suffering.

Look at this one first, son. You see, his tongue is out. He cannot talk. And still he lives. You can feel his heart.

And this specimen here has neither arms nor legs. I had a hard time pulling him through, but his heart is still a-thumping.

Both of them have blood. They live.

In this row of sacks are nothing but flesh and bones. The bodies are drained. They're dead. I keep their blood in separate jugs—all labeled—over there.

Notice, son, the blooded ones are living and the drained ones are dead. That proves the theory which forms the basis of my secret. Life cannot be maintained without blood. It is the very first essential.

Are you cold, son? Your candle is shaking so. Better tuck that blanket close about you. There!

Now let us take our reasoning a step further. We know that blood will maintain life. Then why do we all die in a few short years? Because each body contains only one type of blood—either weak blood, strong blood, old blood, or some other one of the various types. In no body will we find a mixture.

You must remember that some of the types of which I speak tend to increase life and some tend to diminish it. Therefore, we conclude that a correct mixture of certain types, eliminating the undesirable ones, will materially lengthen life. As the average length of life increases, longer-lived types will be forthcoming which, upon being added to our mixture, will still further increase the human span of years. And so on to life eternal!

Do you follow me, son? The process is simple—like all things when once thought out. My difficulty arose over the selection of the correct types for my life-giving potion. I had still to determine my formula. And that is where Jerry helped me out.

This is Jerry's sack. He'll soon be nothing but a powder. That jug there contains what is left of his blood. I had to add certain chemicals to keep it from coagulating. You will notice that it is a rich red. Strong blood!

Listen! Jerry is unusually wild tonight. Guess he knows we're talking about him.

Here is the blood of little Nina. It is lighter in color. Young blood!

Bring your flame a little closer, son. I want you to see clearly.

This is the blood of old Buck Weaver. It is very dark—almost black in the candle light. Old blood!

And there you've seen three-fourths of my formula. Strong blood to give the necessary vitality for a longer life. Young blood to keep the system pliant and active. Old blood to increase the span of years. . . . But the thing is not complete. One other is needed to fill the formula. . . . Bold blood—to lend mental courage and keep the body going. That's where *you* come in, son. . . .

Ah . . . There! Don't struggle. I've got you. Bold blood never says die. This is gorgeous. If you hadn't jumped me then, I couldn't have used you. Bold blood is essential!

See—I can hold you like a baby. And my hair is gray; my bones are old. Another proof of a certain phase of my theory, sir. A man is no better than his blood! And I drink—strong blood!

It's useless, son. Take it easy. Don't be selfish. Think of humanity. Your bones will be famous in my Morgue of Life.

Wait . . . I'll strap you down . . . There! I said that science could make use of you—and now is the time. I envy your martyrdom!

Let's see! My knife! Don't shout, son; you'll frighten little Nina. There! 'Twas thus that I turned it round in wailing Jerry. See how it gushes! Ah! Bold blood is brisk. This is gorgeous. .

Strong blood! Young blood! Old blood! Bold blood! My formula is complete. I can live another century. . .

Are the candles still lit, son? I can —scarcely see. Everything is black—black! My head is—swimming—and I feel all numb.

It's Jerry! I can hear him—wailing —in my brain . . . He's gotten—in! Light—son—*light!* . . . He's choking . . . killing . . . *Ah—h!*

THE following is an extract taken from a feature story appearing in the *Valley Courier*, dated September 10, 1923:

"What happened up there in the Hermit's cabin will always remain a mystery. When Detective Sanderson's men broke in they found a trap door in the floor standing open. The dug-out below was littered with horrors. The ground was caked with dried pools of blood, while gallons of the same liquid filled numerous jugs standing around like wine. Fully a dozen burlap sacks stood arrayed along the wall, each one containing the decomposed remains of a human body.

"Two unidentified men, both drugged, were found tied down to logs. One had his tongue cut out, while the other was minus arms and legs. Both of them are strangers in this locality. They are not expected to live.

"Young Donaldson was found strapped down on his back with a long hunting knife protruding from a horrible wound in his chest. The Hermit was huddled up close by. His whole body was a mass of blood. There are indications of a hemorrhage having occurred from his nose and mouth. It is thought that he died of apoplexy, but no definite statement can be made until after the autopsy.

"Donaldson was the local correspondent of the Associated Press. It is believed that he intended collecting sufficient data to weave a feature story around the Hermit of Ghost Mountain."

The Language of Animals

IS there a language of animals? If one means by language sounds conveying certain sensations, desires and impressions, animals certainly speak, according to the observations of various competent observers. If one means articulate words capable of conveying ideas in the proper acceptation of the word, animals do not have a language.

Language is of two kinds. The first is merely of the senses, expressing only impressions, sensations, etc., and consists solely of inarticulate sounds, cries and gestures of various sorts. This sort of language, which represents no thought, no idea and still less any reasoning process, exists among animals and is common to them.

This confusion in the meaning of the word "language" has led many scientists to defend the untenable opinion that animals have an intellect of the same kind, although in less degree, as that of man.

One authority, Carbonelle, has given a remarkable description of this language of pure sense—cries of joy or of fright, joyous shouts, sighs of sadness or grief, various movements of the wings in birds, waggings of the tail in dogs, etc., and in man the play of feature, instinctive movements and monosyllabic exclamations.

The essential and fundamental difference between this language of the senses and spoken language is that the former, because it represents no idea, implies no conversation. The animals do not talk with one another, and if all the naturalists in the world observe all the gorillas, chimpanzees and orangutans of the African jungles they will never surprise them in a single conversation. They will be able to notice certain cries and gestures, more or less varied, corresponding to the impressions, sensations and passions of all this monkey tribe, just as they might observe the same with any other class of animals.

To have a real language there must be judgment and reason, founded, at least implicitly, on an abstract and universal idea; not an instinctive judgment without freedom, like that of the kid which, seeing the wolf, decides to run away, but a free, conscious and reasonable judgment.

The articulate word, which alone constitutes real language, may be replaced with gestures, with signs, by deaf mutes, for example, just as it is put into certain characters in handwriting, but these characters, signs and gestures correspond in this case to ideas, not merely to the phenomena of pure sensation.

We may recall the failure of the learned naturalist, Sir John Lubbock, who, in spite of several months of daily practice, followed out with unalterable patience, could not teach his dog to read.

The same result awaits all attempts to decipher and note the alleged speech of monkeys.

A Brief Tale of Two Madmen Chained Together

Justice in the Foothills

By CLEMENT WHITE

STARR and Collins were apathetic throughout their brief, dramatic trial. Following the jury's verdict of first degree murder, their sullen demeanor became an integral part of their beings.

They did not show emotion when the sheriff and deputies prepared them for the trip to State's prison to await execution.

Heavily manacled, Starr's left wrist chained to Collins' right, they huddled in the automobile ready for the journey to Mills Junction, where the officers planned to take a through train to the penitentiary.

The weather matched the prisoners' mood. A drizzle dampened the car and its occupants, while great fog banks shrouded the hills. As the car nosed its way along the trail, the mist gradually turned to rain. The sheriff was nervous.

"The road's getting slippery; we'd best put on the chains," he told the deputy. "I'd hate to skid over one of these cliffs. It'd be the finish, I reckon."

Inspection of the tool-box showed the chains were missing.

"We must have left them in the garage," apologized the driver. "The trail ahead isn't any worse than the part we have come over; it's as safe to go forward as to return."

"Go slow, then," replied the sheriff. "I don't fancy this trip. I'd forgotten how ornery this road is."

The car swerved from side to side in spite of the driver's efforts. He was slowing up for a steep descent, when the heavy machine left the trail. It spun suddenly, like a thing bewitched, hurling its occupants over the side of a chasm, while it rolled over and over on its way to destruction in the boulder-studded bottom.

The sheriff and deputies followed the car to the canyon bottom, where Starr and Collins would have joined them, only, as they dropped over the canyon wall, they passed on opposite sides of a stunted cedar. The chain which bound them together held securely, and they were suspended in the air, kicking desperately, almost tearing the tree from its precarious root-hold. Starr hooked a toe over a jutting rock; inch by inch they worked their way to the canyon's rim, and were back on the trail when darkness fell.

Starr was panting; but was not nearly so winded as Collins. He set the pace through the gloom, heading for the foothills to the north. They reasoned that hours would pass before their escape was discovered. Moreover, pursuing posses would be at a disadvantage among the trackless foothills.

The following night they crossed a small stream at a gravel bar and spied a dead fish lying on the bank. Throwing themselves flat on their stomachs, they devoured it in great bites; for with the exception of a rabbit, which a surprised bob cat had dropped, this was their first meal since their escape.

Because of the chain which linked them together, they formed close partnership. Neither could lie down, sit down or arise without the consent of the other. Bitterly they cursed the links of steel which turned their waking hours into a series of mishaps.

So far, posses had not appeared on their trail. This was not strange, considering the wide expanse of sparsely settled country which must be searched. The fugitives were in little dread of men; but, waking or sleeping, they could not rid their minds of the thought of avenging dogs. The anticipation of bloodhounds caused a cold sweat to dampen Starr's clothes, while Collins gritted his teeth and lunged forward with desperate steps. Both men knew of the dogs, half bloodhound, half mastiff, that were owned by a rancher near Mills Junction. It was the boast of the country that these terrible dogs seldom lost a trail, and, when loosed unmuzzled, had been known to rend fugitives limb from limb.

Starr and Collins had one hope. Some years ago Starr had spent several weeks with a renegade hermit, who had a shack in the woods beyond the foothills. If they could reach his shack he would remove their manacles. He might be dead, or he might have moved, but the fugitives hoped against hope that he would be ready to aid and hide them.

The nights were cool in the foothills; but the days were hot. Berries were abundant, hanging dead ripe on countless bushes, providing food. When they stopped to rest they worked persistently at their manacles. If they could sever the chain which bound them wrist to wrist, their progress would be easier and safer. This much accomplished, they might devise a way to remove the handcuffs. They dragged the chain back and forth over flint rocks. They worked and strained and pulled; but the stout links refused to yield. After each trial, Starr and Collins arose cursing, and continued their flight toward the north.

EARLY one morning both men paused simultaneously, holding their breath while they listened. From the south floated a faint echo which froze the blood in their veins. Again the sound echoed. It was the baying of a hound. The baying increased in loudness, as the pursuit grew closer.

Starr and Collins crashed through the brush to a small rock pile; gasping and moaning they dragged their wearied bodies on top of the rocks, and saw the hounds lope through the brush into an open space. The great dogs were unmuzzled. As the fugitives cringed before the attack, the triumphant baying of the hounds gave place to a plaintive whimper. The great dogs paused in their tracks; the hair bristled on their backs, while their tails sank between their legs. Their brute instinct had warned them of a peril which tearing fangs would not guard against.

A wolf had emerged from the brush to the north of Starr and Collins, and its bared fangs, the fetid slaver streaming from its jaws, the eyes staring balefully and the dull, upstanding hair showed that the wolf was mad.

The dogs fled from its approach, but the men were in the path of the frenzied animal. They tried to leap away from the dripping jaws whish slashed them;

but were bitten in several places before a kick disabled the animal.

Hope fled from the hearts of the fugitives as they examined their wounds. They were haunted with the spectre of approaching madness.

They cursed and fought and strained on the chain until their wrists were torn and bleeding. They rolled on the ground and wept, then arose and continued their efforts with the chain.

The presence of each became decidedly objectionable to the other. Who would be the first victim of rabies? This question drove them to frenzied pulling and straining. The thought uppermost in the mind of each was a consuming desire to become separated from his companion. They fought the chain at intervals throughout the night, then continued their desperate journey.

The morning sun stole over the brooding hills. Wild animals feasted, gamboled and basked in the golden sunshine. A fisher emerged from a pool with a fish in its mouth, saw the fugitives, then fled. Grouse went about their affairs undisturbed, and a great eagle sailed in wide circles through the azure air.

Peace rested over wild things; but in the hearts of the two men raged an Inferno. They knew they were to die, and in a measure they comprehended the manner of their death.

As they paused to eat berries they eyed each other sharply, kneeling by the bushes, scratching their faces with brambles as they devoured the watery food. The berries sustained life; but did not strengthen them. Their bodies gradually weakened; but this weakness did not lessen the feverish vigor of their minds.

Each knew what the other was thinking. The one who showed the first symptoms of rabies would be killed, if possible, by his companion.

One afternoon they trudged through a thicket and approached a babbling brook. Hours had elapsed since their last drink, and Starr sank to the ground, eagerly gulping the water.

His thirst quenched, he glanced at Collins, then his body stiffened. Collins was not drinking. His eyes were becoming dull and fixed. A shiver shook his form as they regained their feet. The shaking spells recurred, his spasms becoming more intense.

Suddenly he gave an unearthly shriek and bared his teeth at Starr, who leaped aside in fright, swinging Collins around and around, his fright adding strength to his muscles. Panting and exhausted, they crouched on the ground, glaring and whimpering.

Another spasm shook Collins as they crossed a ridge. He tried to bite and tear Starr's arm. Remembering a fighting trick he had learned in the lumber camps, Starr lunged, with his left knee extended, striking Collins in the stomach. They fell to the ground, Collins made temporarily helpless from the blow. Starr again drove his knee into the mad man's abdomen. Collins raised his head, and Starr dashed his own head against it, the impact driving Collins' head against a sharp stone and rendering him unconscious.

A new difficulty arose; for Starr could not free himself from the helpless body. Its weight hindered his progress as he moved from bush to bush, greedily devouring berries.

When he lay down to rest, the mad man was beside him. He dare not fall asleep while expecting his companion's return to consciousness.

The next day the increasing horror of his predicament caused him to grow hysterical. He called for help, and listened in terror to the lonesome echoes.

Toward evening he saw that Collins was dying. The approaching darkness caused him to stumble and fight through the brush, dragging the burden alongside him.

He came to a rusted spur of track, abandoned since the lumber mill at Rafter had closed. The sight of the rusty rails, and the warmth of the rising sun served to clear his mind; he remembered that the hermit's shack was north of this track.

As he stumbled along, making slow headway, he felt a change creeping over him. He was near a brook and passed a pool of water, and recoiled in fright from its limpid coolness. Spasms shook him and he looked for something to rend and tear. During lucid intervals, between spasms, he struggled grimly through the brush. Each attack was leaving him weaker.

When evening came he looked upon imaginary sights which added to his desperation. His mad brain showed foul vampires flapping through the air about him, throwing water from their wings. And from every side hideous imps called his name, extending vessels of water and inviting him to drink. He sought to slay them; but they recoiled with demoniac grins, only to renew their torments. He thought Collins arose, gazed at him with cadaverous eyes, and asked him to hurry to a pool where they could drink and splash and swim. With bared teeth, Starr showed his displeasure at such an invitation.

He was panting now, and darkness had fallen. His tormentors still offered him water; but between spasms he made slow progress, until a light appeared in the darkness. Gradually the vague outlines of a cabin showed close at hand.

Starr was more normal; he cried with joy at the thought of his relief when the hermit had severed the chains which bound him. Once free, he would smite his tormentors.

He reached the window through which the light streamed, thrust his head through the opening and groaned. The hermit was cleaning a pistol, which he dropped in fright as Starr's groan reached his ears. He saw the face in the window, the lips spread in an awful grimace, showing blood stained teeth, and the sunken, discolored cheeks and staring, glazed eyes—a grisly spectre.

The hermit screamed. His hand reached behind him and grasped a rifle, which flew to his shoulder as the apparition strove to speak.

The rifle rang and Starr lay down to rest, as though soothed by the echoes reverberating among the hills.

Plan To Dig Up Ancient Corpse

CONFIRMING the action of the rector and council of the church of All Saints at Cranham, England, Chancellor Ernest Childs has given Dr. Thornwell Jacobs authority to excavate for the body of General James E. Oglethorpe, first governor of Georgia, who was buried in the middle of the chancel of the old church. Dr. Jacobs, who is president of Oglethorpe University, plans to have the bones of Georgia's founder removed to Atlanta for interment there in a special shrine to be erected on the campus of the university. While the excavating is progressing a religious ceremony will be conducted. The distinterment will be conducted with the most profound reverence.

ZILLAH

An Unusual Novelette

By VALMA CLARK

MY FIRST intimation of Zillah Gruber, as I dozed there in the doorway over a cigarette, midway between the noisy, lighted cheer of the airless shack and the damp gloom of the equally airless July night, came in the clutch of a brown claw of a hand upon my dirt-caked shoe.

I started: "For the love of Pete—"

"You busy, Meester—Chuckles?"

"No—Oh, no."

"You say to come to you when I am afraid; I am afraid now." She had slid upon me out of the darkness and she crouched there, clinging to my shoe. Her ridiculous version of my nickname—something in the contrast it offered to her own sodden life—stabbed at my pity for her; and her appeal to my unfledged manhood was irresistible.

"It's that beast—Gruber again!" I cried.

"No, not him; worse than him. *Sh!* I show you." She stretched her body, which, in its miserable clothes, had always looked to me more like a lean and spiritless bag of old rags than anything human, to peer cautiously into the shack, where the men of our road gang were playing poker; her dark face was sallow with her fear. Now she extended a hand into the patch of yellow light from the door, revealed to me a twist of gay pink wrapping paper. "See!" Slowly she unfolded the paper.

I bent over it. She exerted the witch's power of mesmerism over me. I laughed aloud in my relief; I don't know what I had expected her to conjure up—some evil poison, perhaps, or one of her fearful gypsy charms; it was only a silver crescent, a single earring, of curious design and of quite barbaric size.

"It came—it came today. I have got it out of the mail in the village. It is from Tony; Tony has found me."

"Tony?"

"Tony Zack—my husband."

"But Gruber—I didn't know you'd been married before?"

"Tony is my husband. Joe Gruber—I have run away with him from Tony, six—seven years ago."

"Oh," I murmured inadequately.

"Tony search for me—six, seven years he search. He never give up. I know some day, sure, he finds me. Now—" Zillah's hand closed tight over the silver crescent as though the sight of it were too terrifying for her to bear.

"It comes down in the family," she continued; "the Zacks, they give it to you when they marry you, and it means you are good wife, true wife . . ."

"He's a gypsy too?" I said, for want of anything else to say.

"As gypsy as the ribs of God!" she answered proudly. "He keeps the other earring; it is his way of telling me he comes. Pretty . . . but they sag so heavy I was glad to leave them behind. .

"A long time," she brooded. "Oh I know, Meester Chuckles"—sitting back on her heels she looked up at me curiously—"you think I am old. I am twenty-nine."

Why, she was only ten years older than I! It was incredible. I stared at her, the old, brown face, framed in untidy black hair of an oily straightness, with its deep lines dragging down to the drooped corners of her mouth: a face that expressed nothing so strongly as resignation and a shameful submission. An old, old woman, at twenty-nine! And yet an odd glitter in her black eyes, almost a wildness which I noticed before, challenged me at that moment.

But why—why—? A dozen questions came crowding to my lips. Why had she left her Tony in the first place? And why, by all things holy, had she stayed by Gruber if she was not bound to him? I could only sit and frown over her; I had no precedent, in all the range of my experience, by which I could understand the terrible thralldom of a Zillah Gruber. I thought of the college girls leading us fellows a merry chase, and of my mother whose word was law, over and above Dad's, in our house. My gosh!

"You were afraid of him, too—your—husband?" I tried.

"Yes. He would have killed me sometime."

"Just as you're afraid of Gruber."

"No, I *hate* him." She tried to express it, more to herself than to me: "Tony strikes me because he has a black temper, because he is mad with me. Joe—he strikes me because—because I am his woman, and it pleases him with himself—makes him feel the man . . ." Zillah's whole body drooped flaccidly with her shame.

"But Zillah, if it's a warning, why don't you clear out, leave 'em both flat?"

"No use; Tony follows always. Tony knows I belong to him—it is true of gypsy marriage. And Joe—Joe says I am his," she mumbled.

Well, of course, knowing Gruber, I could see that clash; when you hit Gruber in his sense of possession, you hit him hardest. But Zillah—she irritated me past bearing! That a woman should draw two such brutes must argue something against the woman herself, some appeal to brute nature. "Why do you stand it!" I burst out in a heat.

"Why?" Zillah looked at me blankly, then got wearily to her feet. "He comes back from town; I must go." She dropped the token down her dirty calico blouse, shuddered once convulsively. She concluded the business with a fatalistic and matter-of-fact prediction: "Tony comes all right. When he comes, he kills; he has the right to kill. You will see."

She turned, but, before she slid away into the night, she came back, close to me, with a sudden laughing animation.

"Look," she boasted, "sometimes I have fought back. Once I bit that Tony Zack until I saw the red blood come!"

She was gone then, off to the shell of an empty house, deeper in the hollow, which Gruber, as boss of the gang, had appropriated for himself. She had melted into the vague, pale mists that came in from the river. I, too, shuddered. It was a murky night: a night like Gruber himself, swollen, intruding . . .

II

"HEIGH you, Chuck Adams, come sit in on the game!" sang out Murphy from the tobacco-veiled interior.

They seconded him, Nowak, Cappello, and the others.

I wriggled out, but not before they had put in a curious question or two about "Old Shoe's" call upon me. It was their name for Zillah Gruber. "*Himmel!*" Lutz had once exploded, "she's an old shoe, that woman, for wearing and kicking about."

The appellation had stuck; it was used less contemptuously than pityingly. Chiefly it furnished a means of veiled allusion in Gruber's presence: was a part of the code against Gruber—grunts and syllables which could be uttered before Gruber and which Gruber wasn't in on—that secret code which develops inevitably under tyranny.

"Sure, I wish Maggie'd take half the lip off me that she takes off him!" growled Murphy. "But Maggie, I'm tellin' you boys—"

I wandered off by myself, away from their racket; I was still pondering Zillah Gruber. I recalled that memorable first meeting with her. It was my first Sunday with the gang, and I had been passing Gruber's place, where Zillah was hanging out clothes in the yard, when the boss came from the house in a fury. He was an unwashed, bulging creature in trousers and a pink undershirt; and he flourished in his hand a lavender-striped outer shirt, which was clearly a favorite with him, judging from the howling rage with which he displayed a bad scorch on its bosom. He had been going up to the village on a spree, but how could he go to town, on a Sunday, in a thing like that! He advanced on the woman, called her unprintable names. She cowered. Then he struck her—

According to every code I had ever known, there was only one thing to be done. He was a big man, but I tackled him in the orthodox fashion. It was a brief scrimmage, and—well, I came off alive. Gruber himself was laid up for two days, thanks not to me but to a bad heart. (I dreamed of it as a puffy old fungus of a heart, as unhealthy as the man himself.)

It was a good two days for the men—most of them had witnessed the fight from the shacks—and I was popular. Really, my row with Gruber was the thing that established me with the gang, and mighty lucky for me, considering my position as rank outsider. If, as professional laborers, they failed to see road-building in the light of a combination vacation and football training, at least they accepted me. They even listened to me with respect not due my years when I explained to them how I had done scrub last year, but this year hoped to make the team; and they left me in peace when they grasped the fact that the "math" I was boning over was the only thing that stood between me and my coveted Team!

But to get back—I was now one with them: leagued with them against the boss, to grumble against him when he wasn't listening, to loaf on him when he wasn't looking, to put any little safe thing over on him on every occasion—but to break against him openly, in a big way, never! Their sympathy was all with me. Nevertheless, they predicted there would be the devil to pay when old Gruber found his feet again.

Nothing came of it. Why Gruber didn't fire me, I can't say, beyond the fact that I had got onto the gang through a certain drag with the superintendent.

Not that Gruber conciliated me at all. On the contrary, he now seemed to take a special delight in bullying Zillah in my presence. In me, Gruber had found some one to show; I became his chief audience, saw that enormous egotism of his at its thickest.

As for Zillah, she approached me where I was nursing a bad eye on the peaceful Sunday afternoon of the rumpus.

"You hurt?" She insisted upon bathing and bandaging the eye with a dirty strip of cloth; she knew what to do for black eyes—she was used to them.

"He's hurt, too?" I asked.

"Here—in the heart. It's why he's boss; he can't stand the digging. But he's hurt most in his—his big feeling of himself. You should not do it; you won't do it again—you promise? It's worse—he makes it up on me—"

That was the first time I posed my question: "But why do you stand it—*why?* He's no right to treat you so! Let me report him to the company—to the town authorities—"

"No."

I flung into my arraignment of him all the impatient, hot rebellion of my youth.

She opposed to me the dull passiveness of a servile womanhood, ages old in its habit of acceptance.

There was no stirring her. In the end she had my promise not to interfere again. She agreed to come to me in times of stress; she humored me to that extent. But I had established myself on a basis of confidential friendship with Zillah, and more and more, as the days went by, I became her outlet.

Yet, mulling over the enigma of Zillah Gruber there, reviewing my knowledge of her from the beginning, I was shocked less by these definite, brutal clashes of her life than by the drab setting of it: a drabness that spread and penetrated like the dampness of the July night; a drabness with which that later drama, which was tied absurdly to the crescent earring, was soaked through and through. That people could live like the Grubers was a revelation to me—as much a revelation as the Dark Age slavery of Zillah herself.

There, in an abandoned frame house, they squatted. It was a house of wrecked windows, sad, peeling, with a bare dirt yard about it where chickens must once have scratched, but where no life existed now, not even chickens. You would have said it would be hard to find such a barren spot in this luxurious region of fruit and wheat and growing green things; indeed, it was as though the barren spot had prepared itself on purpose and had stood waiting for this sodden, hopeless couple to come to it.

Beyond and above were the shacks and the torn-up road. All day long, when the wind was that way—and it seemed always to be that way—the Gruber place was swept by the yellow sand of the road, until there was thick yellow coating over everything, like the coating of white lime that chalks the country about a limekiln: the very blades of grass, what few there were, hung heavy under their yellow dusting; it was a veritable desert oasis in a green country. There were no flowers—only the faded, dust-dimmed colors of sad clothes flapping on a line. It was tenement stuff against a farm background. As though the home touch which some women can bring even to a forlorn spot were reversed in Zillah's case, and she could bring only the tenement touch! That was odd, too, for Zillah had lived the life of the open roads, away from cities. But gypsy life, I've noticed, is not what it's cracked up to be; your gypsy camp is apt to be a nasty litter, a human mess, with the sordidness of it accentuated by its ideal setting. . . .

The house was, of course, unfurnished. The kitchen held the only furniture: a rusted stove, a table, a few chairs, some broken dishes, and a stewpan or two, mended by Zillah. It was there Zillah presided, not too cleanly—cooked for Gruber, stared out of the broken window. The roof leaked badly, and in rainy weather Gruber sat within and cursed while Zillah patiently set cans to catch the water. When it became too bad, he ensconced himself under a big yellow umbrella with an advertisement printed across it, and from there taunted Zillah and swore at her in comfort.

But in fair weather, in his off hours, Zillah was relieved of his presence. Gruber installed himself on the naked front porch, where, with his chair tilted against the wall, he held court. Usually he had a flask handy, so he achieved his audience. He boasted; the men listened—he was after all their boss. If Zillah showed herself, he liked nothing better than to abuse her before his men. The men did not ever interfere; their chivalry did not extend that far. Zillah was, you see, Gruber's woman. If another one had stepped in between the man and the woman, I have no doubt they would have cast their vote with her, to a man; as for starting anything themselves—it was beyond their creed. They made up to her by casting her a decent "Howdy, Sister!" when they passed her kitchen, and in their tone was a tacit recognition of the fact that she was with them, against Gruber.

I recall one such episode. The usual crowd lounged on the steps and Gruber himself, as usual, was going good, when Zillah came out to the pump. Now I think I have not spoken of Zillah's peculiar walk; but I shall have occasion to mention that again. She moved with a long masculine stride, which had somehow a little lilt to it, a half-skipping ecstasy: a gait ridiculous in such a miserable little figure, like hitching a light spring wagon onto an old, used nag. Pathetic too, for you knew instinctively that it was something copied—that the woman herself had never known the freedom which that gait expressed.

She came, with that peculiar swinging, lilting walk, and Gruber broke off a tale of himself to attack her: "Hangs t'you like a lock step! Can't ye shake it off? Then I'll shake it off for you! Walk, damn you, walk!"

Zillah curbed her stride, spilling water from the pail.

Bah! It was too much for me. I broke from Gruber's circle, reached Zillah, took the pail from her. Gruber's chuckle followed us to the kitchen.

My rage against him, against her for enduring it, gushed out over Zillah. She stilled me with a piece of coarse yellow cake; it required all of my concentration to remove from the cake the red ants, to which Zillah herself seemed indifferent.

III

ZILLAH was always feeding me things which choked me, in return for the small services I rendered her. Her gratitude for my least attention was a part of her pathos.

Once, on the occasion of my birthday, she even presented me with a formal gift. I came upon her, working with hammer and knife on a flat rock by the kitchen. She was putting the finishing touches on an eccentric pin, which was made from a chicken bone mounted on tin.

"'Tis good luck," she assured me, offering it to me shyly; "see—I wear one always"—she showed me the chicken-bone brooch at her breast.

I thought if my luck would be like hers, I shouldn't care for it, but I attempted the proper thanks. Zillah was modest: it was nothing; the Dad had been a tinker, and she had learned from him.

We spent some decent evenings together, Zillah and I, during Gruber's frequent absences in the village. Hunched up on the kitchen door step, I strummed tunes on my ukulele for Zillah, and sometimes surprised in her a little lift of spirit—a something to match that glitter I had seen in her black eyes. It was fun, too, to see her pleasure over the trifles which I picked up for her in the village dry goods store.

I remember one of those evenings when Gruber intruded. I had brought Zillah, from the Greek shop, a box of chocolates *de luxe*, tied up with a lurid yellow satin ribbon. She had pounced upon the gaudy ribbon with delight; there in my presence, before Gruber's shaving mirror, had unpinned her black hair, and achieved a fearful headdress. Curlycues and spit curls and writhing, thin loops of braid, with the yellow ribbon threaded in: it was like nothing I had ever seen in civilization, but it seemed to please her. My fingers caught up the chords of a gay college song, and I sang the words:

> "'*Oh, the bold dandelion, oh, the brave dandelion. . . .*'"

Zillah's toes, in their old cracked shoes, caught up the tune, and, snapping her fingers, she took a few dance steps, as though to the click of castanets. She was no longer the cowed, spent creature; her face, beneath the yellow ribbon, was still sallow, old, but I had never seen such a snapping, brittle fire in it. Now she broke off laughing, to cram a whole chocolate into her mouth, and she was chewing it luxuriously like a large cud of tobacco, when Gruber walked into the kitchen.

The effect upon Zillah was as though a heavy, wet blanket had been pressed over the flame of her; she simply fizzled out, died.

Gruber tweaked at the yellow ribbon in her hair with his thick fingers. Failing to elicit any resistance from her, he jerked at a lock of the hair itself. Apparently Zillah had not even the life to remove herself from his path. Now his eye fell upon the candy box on the table. Gruber laughed: it pleased him, enhanced his own feeling of power, that others should pay tribute to the woman whom it was his privilege to mistreat. He lunged for the box, balanced it in his hand, and then deliberately, still chuckling, poured out the chocolates onto the filthy floor.

In that moment I could have murdered him cold; I could have strangled Zillah for her listlessness under his insults. I stood panting, my fists tight with my desire. But Zillah, from the floor where she was already patiently picking up the chocolates, shook her head at me.

"Get out, please," she murmured. When I rebelled, she rose, pressed me firmly out of the door, and shut it in my face. She simply sent me home, like a small boy.

The little gallantries which others showed to Zillah tickled Gruber, but let anyone other than himself disparage her—that was a different story! I had seen them walking down the village street together. Zillah, sharp and little and brown, a kind of scarecrow figure, with that absurd gait of hers which amounted almost to a deformity, inevitably drew titterings and the gibes of certain bolder small boys. But Gruber turned on the offenders with a snarl and a growl; chest swollen, he stalked along by the woman, guarding her: the snickers might have been directed at him personally.

Zillah's reaction was odd, for she shrank, not from their mockery, but from Gruber himself. She moved along at his side, her head lowered, humiliated to the dust. Gruber's cruelty to her she could stand, but his protection of her she could not endure; it was somehow the climax of her subjection to him, the fine feathers of her shame. She objected not to his abuse, but to his exclusive privilege of abuse.

Come to thing of it, Gruber's championing of Zillah was, in a way, the final measure of his bullying, male egotism. The egotism of a man who is proud of his wife's beauty is one thing; but the egotism of a man who is proud of a poor specimen of a woman just because she belongs to him, is a bit thicker. As though Gruber's mere ownership of a thing were sufficient guarantee of it . . . as though the very socks he wore became royal wool for being against his shins. . .

Not that Zillah was subtle, but in her heart she felt this; she felt it very

clearly, I knew, from a remark she once made to me about Gruber's maimed left hand. "*Doovel,*" she said, "that Gruber—that hand of his with the finger gone—it's still better than the hands of other people, only because it's *his* hand!"

All these old fragments and snatches of Zillah I had pieced together into a clear picture of her. But as I slept that night, in the heavy air, among the snores of the men, my picture dwindled and tapered off to a single sharp vision of a crescent earring. That, in turn, splintered into a dozen chips, which were somehow the signs of the zodiac: bulls and crabs and scorpions running wild. . . . Now a man with black mustaches flourishing a knife curved like a new moon. . . . I awoke shuddering with the sense of impending disaster.

IV

HE would kill her for her faithlessness when he came, Zillah had stated. But it was absurd, I argued: killing wasn't so easy; besides, the importance Zillah attached to a mere trifling earring was ridiculous. To Zillah, however, it was not absurd. She was in dead earnest. She lived with her fate—wore the symbol of it, a scratch of pink paper, against her shriveled breast, and wore the look of it in her black eyes. Not for an instant, in the two weeks that elapsed before that amazing climax of Zillah's life, was I allowed to forget it.

On the last Saturday evening which I spent with Zillah, I went down into the hollow to find her bent over a pack of greasy cards. She was hunched up at one end of the table, from which the dirty dishes had been shoved back, and by the light of a vilely smoking kerosene lamp, she was spreading out the cards, fan-wise, before her and muttering something like an incantation.

"Whew," I gasped, turning down the wick of the lamp and throwing wide the door, "a little air in here! He's gone?"

"He go soon, but you stay, anyhow," Zillah answered, scarcely looking up. She was wholly absorbed in her cards, frowning over them, mumbling to herself. "I no understand . . . Tony kills *me*, but the cards, they say . . ."

Gruber, togged out in a red necktie and a pink shirt, his hat over one eye, swaggered through on his way to the village. He was in high good humor with himself. "Lord, tea leaves, and nickels in water, and now cards! What's the big idea? I have it"—Gruber swung his leg over the table—"you can just tell my fortune before I step out—huh?"

"No." Zillah's two hands covered her cards.

"Yes, I say. Come along, shoot!"

"No." But in Zillah's eyes grew a little speculative interest, an odd curiosity; clearly the idea of looking into Gruber's future intrigued her. "Well then, if I *dukker* for you, may the blame of it hang on your own head."

Slowly she arranged her cards, monotonously she began her chant: "I see a journey—a far black journey. I see a stranger—a black stranger—an' he bring luck . . . is it bad luck? I see—"

"Tryin' to scare me, old woman? But just remember, *my* luck's *your* luck!"

"Not so sure," muttered Zillah. She was staring up at Gruber now, and her eyes held their curious sparkle. "Do I —go on?"

"Go on!"

"I see—I see a black cloud—the death cloud—"

"To hell with your lucks an' your witch's charms!" he snarled, scattering the cards with a sweep of his thick hand. "Want to spoil my celebration, eh? Well, you can't! See—you can't scare me—Joe Gruber—with your spells and your curses, you old hag, you old devil-ridden—"

There was more of it. Then Gruber pulled himself together, proved his fearlessness by the air with which he adjusted red carbuncle cuff buttons and tipped his hat still further over his eye. He stepped jauntily into the night.

Zillah, her forefinger crooked on the king of spades, ruminated: "The cards, they never lie to me . . . You better have good time, Joe Gruber, while you can . . ."

Now her hand twisted at her breast. She took out the crescent earring, dangled it before her; her black eyes were inscrutable. She hooked the earring in place, and it dragged at the withered lobe of her ear. Before the mirror, she appraised herself, and her face, like a puckered brown cork, was yet not lacking in a certain coquetry. She moved her head, watched the crescent dance and send out silver gleams; she twisted from her hips, studied her whole body, as much of it as was visible in the mirror. She was like a grotesque caricature of a pretty girl whom I had once caught preening before a looking-glass on Prom night.

That was on Saturday. On Monday occurred the one little episode which prepared me at all for the astounding Zillah I was to see: the only forewarning of that sudden freak of her mind and nerves and that lightning-flash of her spirit. I have said that Zillah was meek with an irritating meekness; I have intimated that, if she was kicked, you had a sneaking feeling she was meant to be kicked. Yet I'm afraid, for the sake of the drama, I've shown Zillah at her highest moments; that I've made something more of her than the monotone of submission which she really was. Mostly Zillah was simply dead wood. I give you my word for it, she was a mere thing, a chattel, expressing nothing more lively than a passive adaptation.

But on Monday noon, when Zillah came with Gruber's dinner pail, I saw in her a spark. As she approached, a dog ran from a farmhouse, and snarled, and would have bitten her. I jumped up; two or three other men jumped up. But Gruber was ahead of us. He tackled the dog, gave us an exhibition of vicious temper; in fact, lamed the beast with his heavy shoes. It was the sort of brutality that made him popular in that neighborhood, quite aside from the stories of him that went about!

But Zillah—her face was the thing that caught me: it expressed no fear of the dog, no fear of Gruber, but only a blazing fury of hatred for him. This was the one act even approximating a kindness which Gruber had performed for her, and yet it was the moment at which she hated him hardest.

Afterward Gruber picked up his dinner pail. It contained a slab of the breaded meat which he disliked, and he actually threw it at Zillah. She accepted that insult sluggishly.

But later, when she returned to the house with his empty pail, I followed her, and I saw her fling down the dinner pail and stamp on it in a futile gust of passion. I could only stare.

"Why?" I asked her.

"Why—why! That man—that Gruber—I am not myself, I am his. You have seen it! Can nothing touch me then without touching him, too? If sharp little teeth stick into me, then must they also stick into him? Can't I feel nothing—nothing"—Zillah hammered at her breast—"but what he lets me feel? Bah, just a mercury for his weather . . . a ruler to measure his feeling for himself. That thick, puffy feeling—that man's feeling of himself—ugh! I tell you, it is like a dough around me—it smothers me—" Zillah's face was sick with her utter loathing of him, of herself; she covered it from me.

After a time she took up the tin pail, attempted to straighten it, went listlessly on down.

V

IT was on the very next evening—Tuesday, July the eighteenth, as we all had occasion to remember—that the final catastrophe occurred. One of the gang brought back the news of a band of gypsies camping over by the river. Another—Murphy, it was—came up from the village bearing word of a stranger with a peculiar sloping, lilting stride.

"Divil take me," he swore, "if this fellow isn't the Gruber woman all over again; their two walks match like—like cotton off the same bolt!"

I put two and two together. I ought to warn Zillah. But at that instant a fearful commotion started down in the Gruber shack. The night was still, glamorous with a full moon; now all its beauty was shattered by that Tin Pan Alley clatter. Coarse oaths . . . and falling furniture . . . soft whimpering, like a child's. It was the end with me. I'd do more than whisper a warning to Zillah. I'd bust in and shout a challenge to Gruber, if it was my last act on earth! I'd have that beast in jail for wife-beating . . . I swore it!

I started down on the run. At the very door step I rammed, head on, into the stranger. He stared at me full for a second, and I had an impression of a swarthy, handsome boldness and contempt. Then he pushed me aside with a sharp, "My business—you keep out!" and entered.

He moved with a rhythm. He was swift, sure danger, like a panther. He was alive, as thick old Gruber had never been; and I could see how a fellow like this would get into your blood—how he would swing himself into your walk and how, having known him, you would carry that exuberant mark of him as long as you lived. For a moment he stood by Gruber, looking down at Zillah, who was shrunk against the wall; Gruber was a sodden lump, a pale, thick *cheese* of a man beside him.

Then Zillah saw him. Her eyes dilated, and her hand went up to her ropy throat. "Tony!" she whispered.

Gruber had dropped away, and they confronted each other, the two of them. Zillah crouched lower. She was a figure study in Fear; her face wore the look of a coward woman whose hour had come. She had never looked scrawnier, meaner, uglier, this little dark woman, than she looked at that instant. In spite of my pity for her, I felt a shuddering aversion to her; I thought that the handsome Tony knew the same contempt of her.

"You know why I come?"

"Y-yes." Zillah's terror was the sharpest feeling I had ever seen in her: her face was all tight—screwed up—with it.

"Bah, you—you—!" He advanced a lithe step upon her.

Zillah could not have moved.

But now, with a bellow of righteous rage, Gruber came into it; Gruber's male ownership, the very core of his pride, was challenged.

"You Tony Zack—she's mine, you hear?—mine!"

Scuffle of feet . . . splintering of a bad floor board . . . crash of a breaking dish. Now they were on the floor in a close grapple . . . now on their feet again, rocking together.

It was a pleasant little scramble, a pleasant thing they were scrambling for: one man fighting for the right to kill her, the other for the right to keep her as a target for his moods and a gauge for himself; each of them fighting for the right to whip her after his own individual manner. It was humorous, also, these two strapping men quarreling over this little rag of a woman: not a real woman, but just a symbol—a symbol to one of a faith broken, to the other of a thing owned.

And yet—I don't know what it was that brought me back, in the heat of the battle, to Zillah. Zillah had come alive; she was breathing again and she was following the fight keenly. The glitter was in her eye, and her hatred of Gruber had wiped out all her fear of Tony. She was watching—watching—

Now Gruber was on top in the battle, swelling to his victory. Zillah sickened: it was as though she wallowed in the thick paste of his egotism; as though that immense egotism of possession were about her in folds and layers, shutting her in, choking her. She pushed it off with her two hands. She was shaken by a writhing convulsion. She was fighting for her very life.

Now she had risen behind Gruber's triumphant back, and with her hands she clutched a chair. For a moment she faltered. She was measuring them—Gruber's egotism, stifling her, against Tony's sharp fury, knifing her . . . She was weighing her fear against her utter loathing. But what was a healthy fear compared to this other thing she felt? Better the sudden stab of a knife than that slow smothering—letting his egotism feed and grow, feed and grow on her—

Zillah's shrunken body began to straighten.

"Ha!" gloated Gruber, "I'll show you—"

Zillah stood tall now, and taut. She raised the chair—she raised it high—and she brought it down with a really terrible force upon Gruber's head. For an instant Gruber sagged . . . the swollen bravado of him went down, like air escaping from a leaking balloon. Then he toppled.

It was a rather awful silence. I remember admiring Zillah because she did not herself collapse: she was splendid, and I wanted to cheer for her—a regular razzle-dazzle, three hips! I was also acutely aware of a tipped-up can of bacon grease, which had spilled out and hardened over the stove. A rotten housekeeper, Zillah. . . .

Tony Zack looked up at Zillah from where he had been listening at Gruber's body. "His heart's stopped," he stammered.

"It would stop," she answered distinctly.

They stared at each other, and there was no contempt for her on the man's face now.

Zillah made the first move. "You get out!" she commanded him harshly. "This is my kill. The men, they come." There was no disobeying her in her present mood, and besides, Tony Zack seemed half-paralyzed.

"Oh, 'tis you, Chuckles! You shut up tight your mouth—you hear me?" And Zillah, standing alone, head up, faced the men proudly as they came running.

VI

THE rest is anticlimax. The others—Murphy, Lutz, Gottovi—have criticized Zillah for not living up to the magnificent break for freedom which she made on that night. I don't see it that way myself. It isn't everyone makes a touchdown every game; it's something to have made one touchdown, even if you never pull another. However—

As luck had it, the village happened to be the county seat and the trial was scheduled quickly, so that August saw the whole business through. Naturally, in that neighborhood, popular feeling ran with Zillah: a matter of self-defense, combined with the accident of his weak heart. It was easy enough to establish his abuse of Zillah: every mother's son of us, we testified as to Gruber's brutal treatment of her; moreover, Zillah herself had come off from that last encounter with him bearing the marks of a bad threshing.

Now after Zillah's release came a brief period of a strange blossoming. I've heard of people who desire to be loved for themselves alone; but Zillah, having

given up all hope of love from the world, asked only to be despised for herself alone. She flaunted that odd gait of hers down the street; she seemed to invite the laughter of the village folk, and to thrive on the occasional snicker of a small boy that trailed her. It was as though, through these harsh contacts, she gained a heady sense of her own freedom. At this time she was living alone back in the old Gruber house, and she was something of a camp charge.

But our responsibility toward her was of short duration. The sequel was, I suppose, inevitable, and yet I was totally unprepared for it. I had seen Tony Zack several times—once or twice at the trial—and I knew that the gypsies were still hanging about.

Tony did not come again to the Gruber place; he hated and shunned the haunt of the *gorgio*—the non-gypsy—Zillah informed me. Zillah had visited several times at the gypsy camp, but that seemed to me natural. No, I had no warning beyond a certain new and puzzling remoteness in Zillah herself. Why she did not tell me, I can't say, unless she was ashamed of her weakness.

On a morning of orange sunrise in mid-September, our early breakfast was interrupted by a procession of three canvas-topped vans which invaded our unfinished road.

"Heigh," shouted Murphy, "you can't go no further there! Road's closed."

We loafed out of the mess hall.

A woman had climbed down from the front van, which was painted a lurid yellow, and was calmly removing the wooden horses that barred the way.

"Heigh there!" bellowed Murphy again. "You can't—"

"*Mein Gott,* it's that Gruber woman—that Old Shoe!" exploded Lutz. "Off again with her gypsy first-love!"

"Zillah!" I called. "O Zillah—"

She turned, she paused uncertainly; but Tony Zack, from his seat on the wagon, jerked his head in peremptory command to her, and she crawled back to her perch beside him. The procession lurched on, took the first fork away from the forbidden road up over the hill. So Zillah passed beside Tony, the silver crescents dangling at her ears. She smiled back, but she did not even wave to me—perhaps Tony, with his hatred of the *gorgio,* had forbidden it.

"Can ye beat it?" wondered Murphy. "Out of the fryin' pan into the fire: sure, I'd trust Joe Gruber himself before that gypsy divil!"

The air was cool and pungent with the smell of goldenrod and blue asters; I thought, irrelevantly, of a thick, damp night in July. For an instant, before it dropped down out of sight, the yellow van was silhouetted against a bloody gash from the rising sun, like a clean, sharp wound.

HUNGER

By LEONARD FOHN

MENACING growl and coyotes howl,
Rush on the wind of night.
That crooning tune that very soon
Will change to cries of fright.

A moon of gold in killing cold
Looks ghastly down below,
Where silent shack, in dirty black,
Lies cow'ring in the snow.

And on the walls a shadow falls
And slowly swings around.
The Song of Death, with bated breath,
The wailing wind dost sound!

The body sways in grotesque ways
And makes the shadows dance,
While on the floor and crowding door,
The wolves watch in a trance.

This Story Will Seem Impossible
To Anybody Except a Newspaper Man

The Fine Art of Suicide

By HOWARD ROCKEY

"I CAN'T see why some of these nuts who kill themselves, don't devise an original way," Harry Judson complained, as he puffed away at his pipe and began to lay out a sensational page for the Sunday supplement.

Judson was blonde and blue eyed, and as heavy as he was happy by natural disposition. He smoked an odoriferous brier which greatly disturbed the olfactory nerves of the rest of the staff, and his principal vice was the playing of harmless practical jokes. Yet every Sunday issue of the *Times-Gazette* was a keen disappointment to the genial editor. In his fertile imagination he could always find a more interesting way of doing things than the average mortal seemed able to perform in actual life. And, as a result, the thrillers his fancy conjured up were read from coast to coast.

Divorce suits were his meat—debutantes and their difficulties were his delight. Jewel robberies tickled his soul, and the elopement of the Mahrajah of Goopholee with a common kitchen mechanic, sent him into uncontrollable ecstasies. Usually the "news" stories he printed as fiction were conceived almost entirely from a longing for the bizarre rather than having any basis of fact. But Judson lived and growled in the fond and undying hope that, some day, *someone* would give him a real feature story.

It was a vain hope, perhaps, but one that persisted stubbornly. This in spite of the unvarying monotony of lovers' death pacts and the routine, sordid suicides of morbid Teutons during the dog days.

"Some day," he would muse in his lighter moments, "an inspired genius will actually live or die a real story for me—with all the trimmings that even a Poe could desire—and I won't have to fake a singe detail! In the meantime, the lack of romance in the daily crop of horrors almost drives me nutty. You'd at least think that a man who'd made up his mind to shuffle off this mortal coil would try to make his departure dramatic. A little intelligent thought might make such an exit unique—'distinctively individual,' as the snappy clothing ads say. I've been running the magazine section of this sheet for almost a dozen years, yet I can count on my fingers the stale and conventional methods of committing suicide. Let's see—there's gas, hanging, poison, pistols, artery severing, drowning, and the utterly unnecessary unpleasantness of leaping in front of trains. There are, of course, variations and occasional improvements on the stereotyped form of procedure—but I've never known a modern suicide to show real constructive genius. The ancients did it much better—Petronius, and then Cleopatra, for instance. That girl had a nose for news! If she'd lived today, she'd have been the highest paid feature writer in the whole darned newspaper game, and the scenario sharks would have gone insane bidding for her services. Some babe, I'll say—but they don't grow like that any more."

He sighed, and his assistant chuckled as he looked up from the proofs of a "murder-syndicate" serial.

"How about the chaps who make away with themselves and never leave a trace?" suggested little Sam Roberts. "Maybe they're more clever than you give 'em credit for."

"Yeh?" begrudged Judson. "Maybe so, but fellows like that furnish no stories. Damn it all, you can't expect me to go on inventing stunts all by myself indefinitely. If some bird would only come through with a real idea in real life once in a while, this job wouldn't be such a grind. They ought to give a Carnegie medal to the guy who can think out a really novel, bang-up, A-Number-One method of taking his own life. You can put me down for a ten spot toward a fund to build him a monument right now!

"Kind of look good, wouldn't it?" he went on, letting his fancy wander. "Big marble shaft, with a replica of the death, done in heroic size. Nice bronze tablet on the base, giving the details and the date. Then a scream-head cut in the stone, with this crowning tribute: 'HIS DEATH MADE A DAMN GOOD STORY!' Some epitaph, I'll say!"

"Why don't you try it yourself?" his assistant suggested, with a mischievous grin.

"Too busy!" growled the editor, and went back to his layout. "The thing has big possibilities, just the same. And one of these days, when I get tired of standing for your fool mistakes and all the bulls the composing room makes, I may take a shot at it."

But the assistant felt in a kidding mood, and he let him have some more. "Why don't you invent a brand new idea—get it patented—and then, through the collection of royalties, gather in a fortune?"

"May do." Judson wagged his head, and his bright blue eyes twinkled. "Might start a mail order course, and advertise it in the foreign language and mail order papers. Wops would fall for it hard, and every bride and groom is a potential subscriber in the course of time. Matrimony's like mule-whiskey. You can stand a certain amount of it, and that's all."

With loving strokes, his blue pencil sketched an introduction for his opening announcement. "Why live and suffer," he wrote, "when you can earn everlasting fame and eternal peace by becoming a successful, sensational suicide?"

"That ought to knock 'em cold!" observed his assistant.

"Fair enough, I'll say," commented the art manager from his easel in the corner. "Get it going soon. I'll do the illustrations—and the Lord knows I need the money. The Ford needs new shoes and the baby's shy on dolly drakes."

"Be patient, my son," chuckled Judson. "Don't crowd me. True talent needs time to develop a knockout. But just as a nucleus of my superior suicide system—how does this little stunt strike you?"

"Shoot!" urged his assistant, "pinheads are pining for it!"

"Nix on the rough stuff!" Judson objected. "Everything must be decorous—mysterious—baffling, as the police say—and more melodramatic than a six reel serial atrocity. This little trick I have

in mind requires no experience, and can easily be performed by anyone in any home—with the aid of an ordinary window sash, a jackknife, one small wooden plug, a common kitchen meat-cleaver, and twenty-five cents worth of toy balloons—"

" 'Phone for the big black wagon!" shouted Roberts in mock alarm. "Better ask the daffy house to reserve a padded cell with a sunny southern exposure."

"You wrong me," reproached Judson, assuming an injured air. "I have merely enumerated the materials. Now for the touch of the artist. First we throw up the window sash and take a last look upon the outer world. Then we cut the window cords with our ready little jackknife. This, dear friends, brings us to the need for the wooden wedge. Into this bit of wood we drive a tiny tack, and to it we fasten a string. Next we fasten the meat-cleaver to the lower sash of the window frame—with the sharp, or cutting edge, pointing downward. If the sash does not prove to be sufficiently heavy, so that its own weight will cause it to fall when the wooden plug is pulled out—care must be taken to load its upper portion with a few chimney bricks. These are readily obtainable without one's leaving the house.

"Now, fellow-suicides, we are in readiness for the victim's entrance," he announced with mock dramatic effect. "You will observe, from my brief description of the essential properties, that without material expense or unnecessary trouble, a perfectly practical and thoroughly dependable guillotine has been constructed. Hence we pass on to the balloons. Five or six of these innocent little toys will have sufficient lifting power to carry several pounds into the air.

"This being the case, the intending suicide now attaches the little multicolored gasbags to his head, fastening the balloon strings to his ears, and being careful to knot them neatly, so that they may not escape prematurely. This done, our resourceful hero places his head upon the window sill. The sash, mark you, is still raised and held in place by the plug. The principal's head having been thrust into the outer air, the balloons rise to the full extent of their tethers, and quiver expectantly upon the gentle breeze. They even bob up and down restlessly—impatient as thoroughbreds to be off in a finish race!"

"Some finish, I'll say!" broke in the art manager, but Judson frowned upon his facetiousness. Then, as he paused, with a whimsical smile on his features, his auditors pretended to listen breathlessly. A fascinated office boy stood by the side of the editor's desk and stared at his jovial countenance with wide open eyes.

"The kneeling suicide now pulls at the string attached by a tack to the window wedge," Judson went on to explain. "The slightest jerk and the obstruction flies out. In a twinkling, the window falls! Result—prompt and practically painless death, after the approved French method of exterminating criminals, political prisoners, and obsolete nobility.

"But I have told you only the practical part thus far. Now comes the true dash of mystery spice! The head having been severed from the trunk by the sharp edge of the meat-cleaver, attached to the bottom of the window frame, is carried gently off into the air by the little balloons, which now begin to rise, tugging the head with them. Up and up they go, gently— as a graceful bird might fly—soaring over the housetops and swaying in the wind. Picture it, gentlemen! The amused expression of that novel death mask, as the sightless eyes gaze down upon the city, which never even guesses that the decapitated member of the suicide is not simply another balloon which has broken its tether—perhaps from the hand of some disappointed child.

"And," he continued, warming up as his enthusiasm waxed, "behind us remains the room where no signs of violence are seen. There is left the headless body of the recently deceased. Only the torso and limbs of my graduate pupil remain to solve the mystery of the identity of a man who was weary of the world."

"Some stunt!" Roberts nodded his head, and lit a fresh cigarette. "I follow you perfectly. I picture the startled landlady, knocking at the door in the hope of collecting the rent. Horrified by the tragedy, even forgetting the loss of her money, she becomes hysterical and arouses the other boarders. They crowd into the apartment, followed by the bluecoat on the beat, and all of them chatter at once. Yet even the minion of the law is at loss for a solution of the murder, if murder it be. No one has been seen to go in—no one was seen to go out. Yet the head is not to be found, and it obviously has been carried away. Detectives are balked. The coroner is frantic. The public shudders. Newspapers turn handsprings of sheer delight."

"You said it!" enthused Judson. "I tell you, man, the scheme's fool-proof. Anyone can do it, and no one will be the wiser."

"Just a minute," cautioned Roberts. "You've forgotten the inevitable denouement. After hours, or days, perhaps, or whenever the gas gives out, the balloons sink to earth. Let's assume that they burst or become exhausted over a lonely wood or lake—maybe even far out at sea. In that event, the head is sunk without trace, and no clue to the assumed murder ever comes to light. On the other hand, the suicide's dome may drop in the lap of a lovely lady sitting on Riverside drive. It may fall into the open sack of a lowly picker of rags, and lead to his conviction for a crime he didn't commit. It might, by the irony of fate, fall down the very chimney from which bricks were filched to make the window fall. Then it would come rolling home to join its former body—"

"Suppose it does?" shouted the proud inventor of the system. "Isn't it great, whichever way it turns out? Boy, it's worth a three-column spread on page one, with a starred diagram indicating the spot where the corpse was first lamped! Just suppose our hero has gone to his room incognito—without any trifling possession which might serve to identify him. The body itself bears no distinguishing marks—the labels have been ripped off his clothing, and there isn't even a match in any of the pockets. In that event, dear friends, it would never be revealed what inspired genius had resorted to this instantaneous and intensely picturesque practice of self-execution."

"You win the leather medal for sheer idiocy!" opined the art manager, and the little office boy breathed a sigh of relief.

"What d'yuh mean, leather medal?" Judson demanded resentfully. "I'm going to write that story, and do it right away. I'm going to give you some roughs so you can make the pictures—and I'm going to schedule the yarn. It'll be the biggest Sunday sensation ever pulled on this sheet. It'll show the world a thing or two, when it comes to suicides."

"How do you get that way?" snickered his assistant. "You can't run a yarn like that. You'd be laughed at in every newspaper office from here to hell and back—and even the public would know you were kidding them."

"How come?" demanded Judson irritably.

"How come? Simply because the thing's impossible—sounds all right, and I'll grant you it might get a laugh—but the simple fact remains that it couldn't be done."

"Bet you a hundred it *can!*" Judson produced his wallet. "I'll *prove* that it can!"

"When?" grinned Sam Roberts.

"Just as soon as I finish writing the story," Judson assured him seriously. "I'm going to write up an ante-mortem diary—describe the suicide's sensations hour by hour—right up to the fatal minute. You can leave space for a box to hold that part—and slip it in at the last moment."

"You're batty!" Roberts sniffed at him. "If I didn't know you so well, I'd believe that your love of sensations had gotten your goat to the point where you'd really be willing to do it—simply to make a good story."

"Isn't that a newspaper editor's chief usefulness in life?" Judson glared at him. "Wouldn't any dyed-in-the-wool newspaperman give his life to get a story as good as that?"

And, in due course of time, that is just what Judson did. And stranger still was the fact that the editor's grinning head dropped through the Sunday-room skylight upon Sammy Roberts' desk. Somehow it seemed to say, "I win!" and Roberts nodded his head.

Then he lifted the telephone and told a staff photographer to hurry upstairs with his camera.

"Got a knock-out picture here—just dropped down with some busted balloons—right on top of that story Judson ordered in type!"

The Melancholy Pool

Marked by that priesthood of the Night's misrule,
The shadow-cowled, imprecatory trees—
Cypress that guarded woodland secrecies
And graves that waited the delaying ghoul,
Nathless I neared the melancholy pool,
Chief care of all, but closelier sentinelled
By those whose roots were deepest in dead Eld.
Where the thwart-woven boughs were wet and cool,
As with a mist of poison, I drew near,
To mark the tired stars peer dimly down
Through riven branches from the height of space,
And shudder in those waters with quick fear,
Where in black deeps the pale moon seemed to drown—
A haggard girl, with dead, despairing face.

—From "Ebony and Crystal," by Clark Ashton Smith.

The Crystal Globe

Oh, mystic crystal in whose depths I see
Strange visions—pictures—things that could not be.
And yet, I ponder as I sit and gaze
Into the depth of that transparent maze,
What mental action is it that has wrought,
These fantasies with which my brain is fraught?

For, fantasies they are, and nothing more.
Their mysteries I fain would now explore.
But who can delve the secrets of a dream?
For foolish—simple—complex though they seem
There is that little something, which they hold,
That science unto man has never told.

Preston Langley Hickey.

The Conquest of the Air

"Announcement that the British air ministry soon will establish passenger, mail and freight service with India by air with a fleet of Zeppelins similar to the American 'Shenandoah,' recalls the establishment of many other historic routes to the orient in more than 2,000 years," says a bulletin of the National Geographic society.

"Alexander the Great, Marto Polo, Christopher Columbus, Vasco da Gama, Ferdinand de Lesseps and the Berlin-to-Bagdad dreamers are some of the history makers in whose footsteps the British air ministry is stepping. Most of the routes to the Indies have been marked with wars, yet this is planned in the piping times of peace.

"Five days is the schedule the British set for themselves. Vasco da Gama sailed ten months before he touched the shores of India, and even the English packets that followed his route around the Cape of Good Hope took six months. Fastest steamships make Bombay through the Suez canal today in from fourteen to fifteen days. The air ship cuts the time necessary for this journey two-thirds.

"Aviation shrinks the thousands of miles which have caused wasteful and sometimes fatal delay to races of men since the beginning of history. Recent experiments of the American postal service prove the feasibility of twenty-eight-hour service between San Francisco and New York. One hundred years ago it took twice that number of days to transfer mail from coast to coast. Over the caravans toiling slowly across desert trails 4,000 years old between Cairo and Bagdad, swift British mail planes fly, even now making a hundred trips between these ancient centers to one trip made by canal.

"Alexander crossed the Hellespont, where Constantinople now stands, defeated the Persians after marching through Asia Minor, and went on to India. This route was used to some extent by traders, but its long land journey left it exposed to bandit raids. Brilliant Venice could check the Turks by sea with her navy, but she could not defend the land routes against rising Moslem power. The Turkish barrier led Christopher Columbus and Vasco da Gama to make their historic voyages."

C. M. Eddy, Jr., Spins a Strange Yarn

ASHES

"HELLO, Bruce. Haven't seen you in a dog's age. Come in." I threw open the door, and he followed me into the room. His gaunt, ungainly figure sprawled awkwardly into the chair I indicated, and he twirled his hat between nervous fingers. His deepset eyes wore a worried, hunted look, and he glanced furtively around the room as if searching for a hidden something which might unexpectedly pounce upon him. His face was haggard and colorless. The corners of his mouth twitched spasmodically.

"What's the matter, old man? You look as if you'd seen a ghost. Brace up!" I crossed to the buffet, and poured a small glass of wine from the decanter. "Drink this!"

He downed it with a hasty gulp, and took to toying with his hat again.

"Thanks, Prague—I don't feel quite myself tonight."

"You don't look it, either! What's wrong?"

Malcolm Bruce shifted uneasily in his chair.

I eyed him in silence for a moment, wondering what could possibly affect the man so strongly. I knew Bruce as a man of steady nerves and iron will. To find him so visibly upset was, in itself, unusual. I passed cigars, and he selected one, automatically.

It was not until the second cigar had been lighted that Bruce broke the silence. His nervousness was apparently gone. Once more he was the dominant, self-reliant figure I knew of old.

"Prague," he began, "I've just been through the most devilish, gruesome experience that ever befell a man. I don't know whether I dare tell it or not, for fear you'll think I've gone crazy—and I wouldn't blame you if you did! But it's true, every word of it!"

He paused, dramatically, and blew a few rings of smoke in the air.

I smiled. Many a weird tale I had listened to over that self-same table. There must have been some kink in my personality that inspired confidence, for I had been told stories that some men would have given years of their life to have heard. And yet, despite my love of the bizarre and the dangerous, and my longing to explore far reaches of little-known lands, I had been doomed to a life of prosaic, flat, uneventful business.

"Do you happen to have heard of Professor Van Allister?" asked Bruce.

"You don't mean Arthur Van Allister?"

"The same! Then you *know* him?"

"I should say so! Known him for years. Ever since he resigned as Professor of Chemistry at the College so he could have more time for his experiments. Why, I even helped him choose the plans for that sound-proof laboratory of his, on the top floor of his home. Up to a year or so ago, we were pals. Then he got so busy with his confounded experiments he couldn't find time to be chummy!"

"You may recall, Prague, that when we were in college together, I used to dabble quite a bit in chemistry?"

I nodded, and Bruce continued:

"About four months ago I found myself out of a job. Van Allister advertised for an assistant, and I answered. He remembered me from college days, and I managed to convince him I knew enough about chemistry to warrant a trial.

"He had a young lady doing his secretarial work—a Miss Marjorie Purdy. She was one of these strict-attention-to-business types, and as good-looking as she was efficient. She had been helping Van Allister a bit in his laboratory, and I soon discovered she took a genuine interest in puttering around, making experiments of her own. Inded, she spent nearly all her spare time with us in the laboratory.

"It was only natural that such companionship should result in a close friendship, and it wasn't long before I began to depend on her to help me in difficult experiments when the Professor was busy. I never could seem to stump her. That girl took to chemistry as a duck takes to water!

"About two months ago Van Allister had the laboratory partitioned off, and made a separate workroom for himself. He told us that he was about to enter upon a series of experiments which, if successful, would bring him everlasting fame. He flatly refused to make us his confidants in any way, shape or manner.

"From that time on, Miss Purdy and I were left alone more and more. For days at a time the Professor would retire to the seclusion of his new workshop, sometimes not even appearing for his meals.

"That meant, too, that we had more spare time on our hands. Our friendship ripened. I felt a growing admiration for the trim young woman who seemed perfectly content to fuss around smelly bottles and sticky messes, gowned in white from head to foot, even to the rubber gloves she wore.

"Day before yesterday Van Allister invited us into his workshop.

"'At last I have achieved success,' he announced, holding up for our inspection a small bottle containing a colorless liquid. 'I have here what will rank as the greatest chemical discovery ever known. I am going to prove its efficacy right before your eyes. Bruce, will you bring me one of the rabbits, please?'

"I went back into the other room and brought him one of the rabbits we kept, together with guinea pigs, for experimental purposes.

"He put the little animal into a small glass box just large enough to hold it, and closed the cover. Then he set a glass funnel in a hole in the top of the box, and we drew nearer to watch the experiment.

"He uncorked the bottle, and poised it above the rabbit's prison.

"'Now to prove whether my weeks of effort have resulted in success or failure!'

"Slowly, methodically, he emptied the contents of the bottle into the funnel, and we watched it trickle into the compartment with the frightened animal.

"Miss Purdy uttered a suppressed cry, and I rubbed my eyes to make sure that they had not deceived me. For, in the case where but a moment before there had been a live, terrified rabbit, *there was now nothing but a little pile of soft, white ashes!*"

"PROFESSOR Van Allister turned to us with an air of supreme satisfaction. His face radiated ghoulish glee and his eyes were alight with a weird, insane gleam. When he spoke, his voice took on a tone of mastery.

" 'Bruce—and you, too, Miss Purdy—it has been your privilege to witness the first successful trial of a preparation that will revolutionize the world. It will instantaneously reduce to a fine ash anything with which it comes in contact, except glass! Just think what that means. An army equipped wih glass bombs filled with my compound could annihilate the world! Wood, metal, stone, brick — *everything* — swept away before them; leaving no more trace than the rabbit I have just experimented upon —just a pile of soft, white ashes!'

"I glanced at Miss Purdy. Her face had gone as white as the apron she wore.

"We watched Van Allister as he transferred all that was left of the bunny to a small bottle, and neatly labeled it. I'll admit that I was suffering a mental chill myself by the time he dismissed us, and we left him alone behind the tightly closed doors of his workshop.

"Once safely outside, Miss Purdy's nerves gave way completely. She reeled, and would have fallen had I not caught her in my arms.

"The feel of her soft, yielding body held close to my own was the last straw. I cast prudence to the winds and crushed her tightly to my breast. Kiss after kiss I pressed upon her full red lips, until her eyes opened and I saw the lovelight reflected in them.

"After a delicious eternity we came back to earth again—long enough to realize that the laboratory was no place for such ardent demonstrations. At any moment Van Allister might come out of his retreat, and if he should discover our love-making—in his present state of mind—we dared not think of what might happen.

"For the rest of the day I was like a man in a dream. It's a wonder to me that I succeeded in accomplishing anything at all. My body was merely an automaton, a well-trained machine, going about its appointed tasks, while my mind soared into far away realms of delightful day-dreaming.

"Marjorie kept busy with her secretarial work for the rest of the day, and not once did I lay eyes upon her until my tasks in the laboratory were completed.

"That night we gave over to the joys of our new-found happiness. Prague, I shall remember that night as long as I live! The happiest moment I have ever known was when Marjorie Purdy promised to become my wife."

"YESTERDAY was another day of unalloyed bliss. All day long my sweetheart and I worked side by side. Then followed another night of love-making. If you've never been in love with the only girl in the world, Prague, you can't understand the delirious joy that comes from the very thought of her! And Marjorie returned my devotion a hundred-fold. She gave herself unreservedly into my keeping.

"Along about noontime, today, I needed something to complete an experiment, and I stepped over to the drug store for it.

"When I returned I missed Marjorie. I looked for her hat and coat, and they were gone. The Professor had not shown himself since the experiment upon the rabbit, and was locked in his workshop.

"I asked the servants, but none of them had seen her leave the house, nor had she left any message for me.

"As the afternoon wore on I grew frantic. Evening came, and still no sign of my dear litle girl.

"All thought of work was forgotten. I paced the floor of my room like a caged lion. Every jangle of the 'phone or ring at the door bolstered up my faltering hopes of some word from her, but each time I was doomed to disappointment. Each minute seemed an hour; each hour an eternity!

"Good God, Prague! You can't imagine how I suffered! From the heights of sublime love I mentally plunged to the darkest depths of despair. I conjured visions of all sorts of terrible fates overtaking her. Still, not a word did I hear.

"It seemed to me that I had lived a lifetime, but my watch told me it was only half-past seven when the butler told me that Van Allister wanted me in the laboratory.

"I was in no mood for experiments, but while I was under his roof he was my master, and it was for me to obey.

"The Professor was in his workshop, the door slightly ajar. He called to me to close the door of the laboratory and join him in the little room.

"In my state of mind my brain photographed every minute detail of the scene which met my eyes. In the center of the room, on a marble-top table, was a glass case about the shape and size of a coffin. It was filled almost to the brim with that same colorless liquid which the small bottle had contained, two days before.

"At the left, on a glass-top tabourette, was a newly-labeled glass jar. I could not repress an involuntary shudder as I realized that it was filled with soft, white ashes. Then I saw something that almost made my heart stop beating!

"On a chair, in a far corner of the workshop, was the hat and coat of the girl who had pledged her life to mine—the girl whom I had vowed to cherish and protect while life should last!

"My senses were numbed, my soul surcharged with horror, as realization flashed over me. There could be but one explanation. *The ashes in that jar were the ashes of Marjorie Purdy!*"

"THE world stood still for one long, terrible moment, and then I went mad—stark, staring mad!

"The next I can remember, the Professor and I were locked in a desperate struggle. Old as he was, he still possessed a strength nearly equal to mine, and he had the added advantage of calm self-possession.

"Closer and closer he forced me to the glass coffin. A few moments more and my ashes would join those of the girl I had loved. I stumbled against the tabourette, and my fingers closed over the jar of ashes. With one, last, superhuman effort, I raised it high above my head, and brought it down with crushing force upon the skull of my antagonist! His arm relaxed, his limp form dropped in a senseless heap to the floor.

"Still acting upon impulse, I raised the silent form of the Professor and carefully, lest I should spill some of it on the floor, lowered the body into the casket of death!

"A moment, and it was over. Professor and liquid, both, were gone, and in their place was a little pile of soft, white ashes!

"As I gazed at my handiwork the brainstorm passed away, and I came face to face with the cold, hard truth that I had killed a fellow-being. An unnatural calm possessed me. I knew that there was not one single shred of evidence against me, barring the fact that I was the last one known to be alone with the Professor. Nothing remained but ashes!

"I put on my hat and coat, told the butler that the Professor had left word he was not to be disturbed, and that I was going out for the evening. Once outside, all my self-possession vanished. My nerves were shot to pieces. I don't know where I went—only that I wandered aimlessly, here and there, until I found myself outside your apartment, just a little while ago.

"Prague, I felt as if I must talk with someone; that I must unburden my tortured mind. I knew that I could trust you, old pal, so I've told you the whole

story. Here I am—do with me as you will. Life holds nothing more for me, now that—Marjorie—is—gone!"

BRUCE'S voice trembled with emotion and broke as he mentioned the name of the girl he loved.

I leaned across the table, and gazed searchingly into the eyes of the abject figure that slouched dejectedly in the big chair. Then I rose, put on my hat and coat, crossed to Bruce, who had buried his head in his arms and was shaking with silent sobs.

"Bruce!"

Malcolm Bruce raised his eyes.

"Bruce, listen to me. *Are you sure Marjorie Purdy is dead?*"

"Am I sure that—" His eyes widened at the suggestion, and he sat erect with a sudden start.

"Exactly," I went on. "Are you positive that the ashes in that jar were the ashes of Marjorie Purdy?"

"Why—I—see here, Prague! What are you driving at?"

"Then you're *not* sure. You saw the girl's hat and coat in that chair, and in your state of mind you jumped at conclusions. 'The ashes must be those of the missing girl. . . . The Professor must have made away with her. . . .' and all that. Come now, did Van Allister *tell* you anything—"

"I don't know what he said. I tell you I went *berserk*—mad!"

"Then you come along with me. If she's not dead, she must be somewhere in that house, and is she *is* there, we're going to find her!"

On the street we hailed a taxi, and in a few moments the butler admitted us to Van Allister's home. Bruce let us into the laboratory with his key. The door of the workshop was still ajar.

My eyes swept the room in a comprehensive survey. At the left, over near the window, was a closed door. I strode across the room and tried the knob, but it refused to yield.

"Where does that lead?"

"Just an anteroom, where the Professor keeps his apparatus."

"All the same, that door's coming open," I returned, grimly. Stepping back a pace or two, I planted a well-directed kick upon the door. Another, and still another, and the frame-work around the lock gave way.

Bruce, with an inarticulate cry, sped across the room to a huge mahogany chest. He selected one of the keys on his ring, inserted it in the lock, and flung back the cover with trembling hands.

"Here she is, Prague—quick! Get her out where there's air!"

Together we bore the limp figure of the girl into the laboratory. Bruce hastily mixed a concoction which he forced between her lips. A second dose, and her eyes slowly opened.

Her bewildered glance traveled around the room, at last resting on Bruce, and her eyes lighted with sudden, happy recognition. Later, after the first few moments of reunion, the girl told us her story:

"After Malcolm went out, this afternoon, the Professor sent word to me to come into the workshop. As he often summoned me to do some errand or other, I thought nothing of it, and to save time, took my hat and coat along. He closed the door of the little room, and, without warning, attacked me from behind. He overpowered me, tied me hand and foot. It was needless to gag me. As you know, the laboratory is absolutely sound-proof.

"Then he produced a huge Newfoundland dog he had secured from somewhere or other, reduced it to ashes before my very eyes, and put the ashes in a glass jar that was on a tabourette in the workshop.

"He went into the anteroom and, from the chest where you found me, took out the glass casket. At least, it seemed a casket to my terror-stricken eyes! He mixed enough of his horrible liquid to fill it almost to the brim.

"Then he told me that but one thing remained. That was—to perform the experiment upon a human being!" She shuddered at the recollection. "He dilated at length upon what a privilege it would be for anyone to sacrifice his life in such a manner, for such a cause. Then he calmly informed me that he had selected you as the subject of his experiment, and that I was to play the role of witness! I fainted.

"The Professor must have feared some sort of intrusion, for the next I remember is waking inside the chest where you discovered me. It was stifling! Every breath I took came harder and harder. I thought of you, Malcolm—thought of the wonderful, happy hours we had spent together the last few days. I wondered what I would do when you were gone! I ever prayed that he would kill me, too! My throat grew parched and dry—everything went black before my eyes.

"Next, I opened them to find myself here—with you, Malcolm," her voice sank to a hoarse, nervous whisper. "Where—where is the Professor?"

Bruce silently led her into the workshop. She shivered as the coffin of glass came within her range of vision. Still silently, he crossed directly to the casket, and, taking up a handful of the soft, white ashes, let them sift slowly through his fingers!

New Use Found for Goldfish

JOHN MARSHALL, Syracuse bird specialist, offers the latest "sure cure" for nervous disorders. His remedy is goldfish. Marshall advances the theory that the sight of a goldfish swimming calmly around in its tiny bowl is a certain remedy for nervous ills.

Not only that. The finny fish will induce thought and contemplation. It is also a guaranteed remedy for insomnia, and hospitals are among the largest purchasers of goldfish, Marshall says.

If you are unable to think, Marshall recommends a goldfish treatment. Place the fish in your parlor window. Seat yourself beside the bowl and watch the leisurely travels of the radiant swimmer. A soothed, relaxed condition will ensue. Contemplation will produce ratiocination, and—lo!—the patient has a genuine thought.

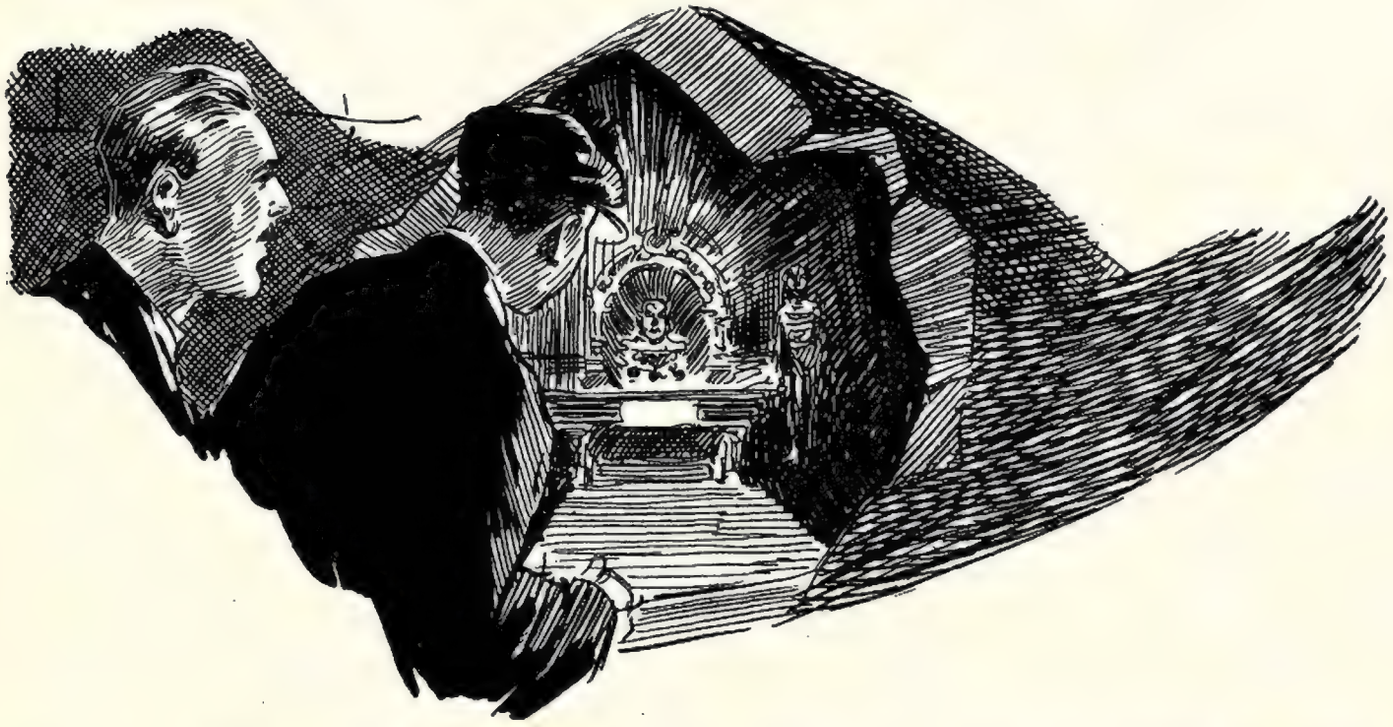
The same process applied to insomnia will produce sleep on the heels of the soothed, contemplative feeling, Marshall claims.

The goldfish, incidentally, is displacing all other rivals for leadership of the pet kingdom. With the approach of winter, dogs, the open-season kings of pet demand, are less and less sought, and the pet lover's desire turns toward canaries, macaws and parrots, but particularly to goldfish.

A Tremendous Tale That Rises Steadily To a Terrifying Climax

The Rats in the Walls

By H. P. LOVECRAFT



ON July 16, 1923, I moved into Exham Priory after the last workman had finished his labors. The restoration had been a stupendous task, for little had remained of the deserted pile but a shell-like ruin; yet because it had been the seat of my ancestors I let no expense deter me. The place had not been inhabited since the reign of James the First, when a tragedy of intensely hideous, though largely unexplained, nature had struck down the master, five of his children, and several servants; and driven forth under a cloud of suspicion and terror the third son, my lineal progenitor and the only survivor of the abhorred line.

With this sole heir denounced as a murderer, the estate had reverted to the crown, nor had the accused man made any attempt to exculpate himself or regain his property. Shaken by some horror greater than that of conscience or the law, and expressing only a frantic wish to exclude the ancient edifice from his sight and memory, Walter de la Poer, eleventh Baron Exham, fled to Virginia and there founded the family which by the next century had become known as Delapore.

Exham Priory had remained untenanted, though later allotted to the estates of the Norrys family and much studied because of its peculiarly composite architecture; an architecture involving Gothic towers resting on a Saxon or Romanesque substructure, whose foundation in turn was of a still earlier order or blend of orders—Roman, and even Druidic or native Cymric if legends speak truly. This foundation was a very singular thing, being merged on one side with the solid limestone of the precipice from whose brink the priory overlooked a desolate valley three miles west of the village of Anchester.

Architects and antiquarians loved to examine this strange relic of forgotten centuries, but the country folk hated it. They had hated it hundreds of years before, when my ancestors lived there, and they hated it now, with the moss and mould of abandonment on it. I had not been a day in Anchester before I knew I came of an accursed house. And this week workmen have blown up Exham Priory, and are busy obliterating the traces of its foundations.

THE bare statistics of my ancestry I had always known, together with the fact that my first American forbear had come to the colonies under a strange cloud. Of details, however, I had been kept wholly ignorant through the policy of reticence always maintained by the Delapores. Unlike our planter neighbors, we seldom boasted of crusading ancestors or other mediæval and Renaissance heroes; nor was any kind of tradition handed down except what may have been recorded in the sealed envelope left before the Civil War by every squire to his eldest son for posthumous opening. The glories we cherished were those achieved since the migration; the glories of a proud and honorable, if somewhat reserved and unsocial Virginia line.

During the war our fortunes were extinguished and our whole existence changed by the burning of Carfax, our home on the banks of the James. My grandfather, advanced in years, had perished in that incendiary outrage, and with him the envelope that bound us all to the past. I can recall that fire today as I saw it then at the age of seven, with the Federal soldiers shout-

ing, the women screaming, and the negroes howling and praying. My father was in the army, defending Richmond, and after many formalities my mother and I were passed through the lines to join him.

When the war ended we all moved north, whence my mother had come; and I grew to manhood, middle age, and ultimate wealth as a stolid Yankee. Neither my father nor I ever knew what our hereditary envelope had contained, and as I merged into the greyness of Massachusetts business life I lost all interest in the mysteries which evidently lurked far back in my family tree. Had I suspected their nature, how gladly would I have left Exham Priory to its moss, bats, and cobwebs!

My father died in 1904, but without any message to leave to me, or to my only child, Alfred, a motherless boy of ten. It was this boy who reversed the order of family information, for although I could give him only jesting conjectures about the past, he wrote me of some very interesting ancestral legends when the late war took him to England in 1917 as an aviation officer. Apparently the Delapores had a colorful and perhaps sinister history, for a friend of my son's, Capt. Edward Norrys of the Royal Flying Corps, dwelt near the family seat at Anchester and related some peasant superstitions which few novelists could equal for wildness and incredibility. Norrys himself, of course, did not take them seriously; but they amused my son and made good material for his letters to me. It was this legendry which definitely turned my attention to my transatlantic heritage, and made me resolve to purchase and restore the family seat which Norrys showed to Alfred in its picturesque desertion, and offered to get for him at a surprisingly reasonable figure, since his own uncle was the present owner.

I bought Exham Priory in 1918, but was almost immediately distracted from my plans of restoration by the return of my son as a maimed invalid. During the two years that he lived I thought of nothing but his care, having even placed my business under the direction of partners.

In 1921, as I found myself bereaved and aimless, a retired manufacturer no longer young, I resolved to divert my remaining years with my new possession. Visiting Anchester in December, I was entertained by Capt. Norrys, a plump, amiable young man who had thought much of my son, and secured his assistance in gathering plans and anecdotes to guide in the coming restoration. Exham Priory itself I saw without emotion, a jumble of tottering mediæval ruins covered with lichens and honeycombed with rooks' nests, perched perilously upon a precipice, and denuded of floors or other interior features save the stone walls of the separate towers.

As I gradually recovered the image of the edifice as it had been when my ancestors left it over three centuries before, I began to hire workmen for the reconstruction. In every case I was forced to go outside the immediate locality, for the Anchester villagers had an almost unbelievable fear and hatred of the place. This sentiment was so great that it was sometimes communicated to the outside laborers, causing numerous desertions; whilst its scope appeared to include both the priory and its ancient family.

My son had told me that he was somewhat avoided during his visits because he was a de la Poer, and I now found myself subtly ostracised for a like reason until I convinced the peasants how little I knew of my heritage. Even then they sullenly disliked me, so that I had to collect most of the village traditions through the mediation of Norrys. What the people could not forgive, perhaps, was that I had come to restore a symbol so abhorrent to them; for, rationally or not, they viewed Exham Priory as nothing less than a haunt of fiends and werewolves.

PIECING together the tales which Norrys collected for me, and supplementing them with the accounts of several savants who had studied the ruins, I deduced that Exham Priory stood on the site of a prehistoric temple; a Druidical or ante-Druidical thing which must have been contemporary with Stonehenge. That indescribable rites had been celebrated there, few doubted, and there were unpleasant tales of the transference of these rites into the Cybele-worship which the Romans had introduced.

Inscriptions still visible in the subcellar bore such unmistakable letters as "DIV . . . OPS . . . MAGNA. MAT . . . " sign of the Magna Mater whose dark worship was once vainly forbidden to Roman citizens. Anchester had been the camp of the third Augustan legion, as many remains attest, and it was said that the temple of Cybele was splendid and thronged with worshippers who performed nameless ceremonies at the bidding of a Phrygian priest. Tales added that the fall of the old religion did not end the orgies at the temple, but that the priests lived on in the new faith without real change. Likewise was it said that the rites did not vanish with the Roman power, and that certain among the Saxons added to what remained of the temple, and gave it the essential outline it subsequently preserved, making it the center of a cult feared through half the heptarchy. About 1000 A. D. the place is mentioned in a chronicle as being a substantial stone priory housing a strange and powerful monastic order and surrounded by extensive gardens which needed no walls to exclude a frightened populace. It was never destroyed by the Danes, though after the Norman Conquest it must have declined tremendously; since there was no impediment when Henry the Third granted the site to my ancestor, Gilbert de la Poer, First Baron Exham, in 1261.

Of my family before this date there is no evil report, but something strange must have happened then. In one chronicle there is a reference to a de la Poer as "cursed of God" in 1307, whilst village legendry had nothing but evil and frantic fear to tell of the castle that went up on the foundations of the old temple and priory. The fireside tales were of the most grisly description, all the ghastlier because of their frightened reticence and cloudy evasiveness. They represented my ancestors as a race of hereditary dæmons beside whom Gilles de Retz and the Marquis de Sade would seem the veriest tyros, and hinted whisperingly at their responsibility for the occasional disappearances of villagers through several generations.

The worst characters, apparently, were the barons and their direct heirs: at least, most was whispered about these. If of healthier inclinations, it was said, an heir would early and mysteriously die to make way for another more typical scion. There seemed to be an inner cult in the family, presided over by the head of the house, and sometimes closed except to a few members. Temperament rather than ancestry was evidently the basis of this cult, for it was entered by several who married into the family. Lady Margaret Trevor from Cornwall, wife of Godfrey, the second son of the fifth baron, became a favorite bane of children all over the countryside, and the dæmon heroine of a particularly horrible old ballad not yet extinct near the Welsh border. Preserved in balladry, too, though not illustrating the same point, is the hideous tale of Lady Mary de la Poer, who shortly after her marriage to the Earl of Shrewsfield was killed by him and his mother, both of the slayers being absolved and blessed by the priest to whom they confessed what they dared not repeat to the world.

These myths and ballads, typical as they were of crude superstition, repelled me greatly. Their persistence, and their application to so long a line of my ancestors, were especially annoying; whilst the imputations of monstrous habits proved unpleasantly reminiscent of the one known scandal of my immediate forbears—the case of my cousin, young Randolph Delapore of Carfax, who went among the negroes and became a voodoo priest after he returned from the Mexican War.

I was much less disturbed by the vaguer tales of wails and howlings in the barren, windswept valley beneath the limestone cliff; of the graveyard stenches after the spring rains; of the floundering, squealing white thing on which Sir John Clave's horse had trod one night in a lonely field; and of the servant who had gone mad at what he saw in the priory in the full light of day. These things were hackneyed spectral lore, and I was at that time a pronounced skeptic. The accounts of vanished peasants were less to be dismissed, though not especially significant in view of mediæval custom. Prying curiosity meant death, and more than one severed head had been publicly shown on the bastions—now effaced—around Exham Priory.

A few of the tales were exceedingly picturesque, and made me wish I had learnt more of the comparative mythology in my youth. There was, for instance, the belief that a legion of bat-winged devils kept witches' sabbath each night at the priory—a legion whose sustenance might explain the disproportionate abundance of coarse vegetables harvested in the vast gardens. And, most vivid of all, there was the dramatic epic of the rats—the scampering army of obscene vermin which had burst forth from the castle three months after the tragedy that doomed it to desertion—the lean, filthy, ravenous army which had swept all before it and devoured fowl, cats, dogs, hogs, sheep, and even two hapless human beings before its fury was spent. Around that unforgettable rodent army a whole separate cycle of myths revolves, for it scattered among the village homes and brought curses and horrors in its train.

Such was the lore that assailed me as I pushed to completion, with an elderly obstinacy, the work of restoring my ancestral home. It must not be imagined for a moment that these tales formed my principal psychological environment. On the other hand, I was constantly praised and encouraged by Capt. Norrys and the antiquarians who surrounded and aided me. When the task was done, over two years after its commencement, I viewed the great rooms, wainscotted walls, vaulted ceilings, mullioned windows, and broad staircases with a pride which fully compensated for the prodigious expense of the restoration.

Every attribute of the Middle Ages was cunningly reproduced, and the new parts blended perfectly with the original walls and foundations. The seat of my fathers was complete, and I looked forward to redeeming at last the local fame of the line which ended in me. I would reside here permanently, and prove that a de la Poer (for I had adopted again the original spelling of the name) need not be a fiend. My comfort was perhaps augmented by the fact that, although Exham Priory was mediævally fitted, its interior was in truth wholly new and free from old vermin and old ghosts alike.

AS I have said, I moved in on July 16, 1923. My household consisted of seven servants and nine cats, of which latter species I am particularly fond. My eldest cat, "Nigger-Man," was seven years old and had come with me from my home in Bolton, Massachusetts; the others I had accumulated whilst living with Capt. Norrys' family during the restoration of the priory.

For five days our routine proceeded with the utmost placidity, my time being spent mostly in the codification of old family data. I had now obtained some very circumstantial accounts of the final tragedy and flight of Walter de la Poer, which I conceived to be the probable contents of the hereditary paper lost in the fire at Carfax. It appeared that my ancestor was accused with much reason of having killed all the other members of his household, except four servant confederates, in their sleep, about two weeks after a shocking discovery which changed his whole demeanor, but which, except by implication, he disclosed to no one save perhaps the servants who assisted him and afterward fled beyond reach.

This deliberate slaughter, which included a father, three brothers, and two sisters, was largely condoned by the villagers, and so slackly treated by the law that its perpetrator escaped honored, unharmed, and undisguised to Virginia; the general whispered sentiment being that he had purged the land of an immemorial curse. What discovery had prompted an act so terrible, I could scarcely even conjecture. Walter de la Poer must have known for years the sinister tales about his family, so that this material could have given him no fresh impulse. Had he, then, witnessed some appalling ancient rite, or stumbled upon some frightful and revealing symbol in the priory or its vicinity? He was reputed to have been a shy, gentle youth in England. In Virginia he seemed not so much hard or bitter as harassed and apprehensive. He was spoken of in the diary of another gentleman adventurer, Francis Harley of Bellview, as a man of unexampled justice, honor, and delicacy.

On July 22 occurred the first incident which, though lightly dismissed at the time, takes on a preternatural significance in relation to later events. It was so simple as to be almost negligible, and could not possibly have been noticed under the circumstances; for it must be recalled that since I was in a building practically fresh and new except for the walls, and surrounded by a well-balanced staff of servitors, apprehension would have been absurd despite the locality.

What I afterward remembered is merely this—that my old black cat, whose moods I know so well, was undoubtedly alert and anxious to an extent wholly out of keeping with his natural character. He roved from room to room, restless and disturbed, and sniffed constantly about the walls which formed part of the old Gothic structure. I realize how trite this sounds—like the inevitable dog in the ghost story, which always growls before his master sees the sheeted figure—yet I cannot consistently suppress it.

The following day a servant complained of restlessness among all the cats in the house. He came to me in my study, a lofty west room on the second story, with groined arches, black oak panelling, and a triple Gothic window overlooking the limestone cliff and desolate valley; and even as he spoke I saw the jetty form of Nigger-Man creeping along the west wall and scratching at the new panels which overlaid the ancient stone.

I told the man that there must be some singular odor or emanation from the old stonework, imperceptible to human senses, but affecting the delicate organs of cats even through the new woodwork. This I truly believed, and when the fellow suggested the presence of mice or rats, I mentioned that there had been no rats there for three hundred years, and that even the field mice of the surrounding country could hardly be found in these high walls, where they had never been known to stray. That afternoon I called on Capt. Norrys, and he assured me that it would be quite incredible for field mice to infest the pri-

ory in such a sudden and unprecedented fashion.

That night, dispensing as usual with a valet, I retired in the west tower chamber which I had chosen as my own, reached from the study by a stone staircase and short gallery—the former partly ancient, the latter entirely restored. This room was circular, very high, and without wainscotting, being hung with arras which I had myself chosen in London.

Seeing that Nigger-Man was with me, I shut the heavy Gothic door and retired by the light of the electric bulbs which so cleverly counterfeited candles, finally switching off the light and sinking on the carved and canopied four-poster, with the venerable cat in his accustomed place across my feet. I did not draw the curtains, but gazed out at the narrow north window which I faced. There was a suspicion of aurora in the sky, and the delicate traceries of the window were pleasantly silhouetted.

At some time I must have fallen quietly asleep, for I recall a distinct sense of leaving strange dreams, when the cat started violently from his placid position. I saw him in the faint auroral glow, head strained forward, forefeet on my ankles, and hind feet stretched behind. He was looking intensely at a point on the wall somewhat west of the window, a point which to my eye had nothing to mark it, but toward which all my attention was now directed.

And as I watched, I knew that Nigger-Man was not vainly excited. Whether the arras actually moved I cannot say. I think it did, very slightly. But what I can swear to is that behind it I heard a low, distinct scurrying as of rats or mice. In a moment the cat had jumped bodily on the screening tapestry, bringing the affected section to the floor with his weight, and exposing a damp, ancient wall of stone; patched here and there by the restorers, and devoid of any trace of rodent prowlers.

Nigger-Man raced up and down the floor by this part of the wall, clawing the fallen arras and seemingly trying at times to insert a paw between the wall and the oaken floor. He found nothing, and after a time returned wearily to his place across my feet. I had not moved, but I did not sleep again that night.

IN the morning I questioned all the servants, and found that none of them had noticed anything unusual, save that the cook remembered the actions of a cat which had rested on her windowsill. This cat had howled at some unknown hour of the night, awaking the cook in time for her to see him dart purposefully out of the open door down the stairs. I drowsed away the noontime, and in the afternoon called again on Capt. Norrys, who became exceedingly interested in what I told him. The odd incidents—so slight yet so curious—appealed to his sense of the picturesque, and elicited from him a number of reminiscences of local ghostly lore. We were genuinely perplexed at the presence of rats, and Norrys lent me some traps and paris-green, which I had the servants place in strategic localities when I returned.

I retired early, being very sleepy, but was harassed by dreams of the most horrible sort. I seemed to be looking down from an immense height upon a twilit grotto, knee-deep with filth, where a white-bearded daemon swineherd drove about with his staff a flock of fungous, flabby beasts whose appearance filled me with unutterable loathing. Then, as the swineherd paused and nodded over his task, a mighty swarm of rats rained down on the stinking abyss and fell to devouring beasts and man alike.

From this terrific vision I was abruptly awaked by the motions of Nigger-Man, who had been sleeping as usual across my feet. This time I did not have to question the source of his snarls and hisses, and of the fear which made him sink his claws into my ankle, unconscious of their effect; for on every side of the chamber the walls were alive with nauseous sound—the verminous slithering of ravenous, gigantic rats. There was now no aurora to show the state of the arras—the fallen section of which had been replaced—but I was not too frightened to switch on the light.

As the bulbs leapt into radiance I saw a hideous shaking all over the tapestry, causing the somewhat peculiar designs to execute a singular dance of death. This motion disappeared almost at once, and the sound with it. Springing out of bed, I poked at the arras with the long handle of a warming-pan that rested near, and lifted one section to see what lay beneath. There was nothing but the patched stone wall, and even the cat had lost his tense realization of abnormal presences. When I examined the circular trap that had been placed in the room, I found all of the openings sprung, though no trace remained of what had been caught and had escaped.

Further sleep was out of the question, so, lighting a candle, I opened the door and went out in the gallery toward the stairs to my study, Nigger-Man following at my heels. Before we had reached the stone steps, however, the cat darted ahead of me and vanished down the ancient flight. As I descended the stairs myself, I became suddenly aware of sounds in the great room below; sounds of a nature which could not be mistaken.

The oak-paneled walls were alive with rats, scampering and milling, whilst Nigger-Man was racing about with the fury of a baffled hunter. Reaching the bottom, I switched on the light, which did not this time cause the noise to subside. The rats continued their riot, stampeding with such force and distinctness that I could finally assign to their motions a definite direction. These creatures, in numbers apparently inexhaustible, were engaged in one stupendous migration from inconceivable heights to some depth conceivably, or inconceivably, below.

I now heard steps in the corridor, and in another moment two servants pushed open the massive door. They were searching the house for some unknown source of disturbance which had thrown all the cats into a snarling panic and caused them to plunge precipitately down several flights of stairs and squat, yowling, before the closed door to the sub-cellar. I asked them if they had heard the rats, but they replied in the negative. And when I turned to call their attention to the sounds in the panels, I realized that the noise had ceased.

With the two men, I went down to the door of the sub-cellar, but found the cats already dispersed. Later I resolved to explore the crypt below, but for the present I merely made a round of the traps. All were sprung, yet all were tenantless. Satisfying myself that no one had heard the rats save the felines and me, I sat in my study till morning, thinking profoundly, and recalling every scrap of legend I had unearthed concerning the building I inhabited.

I SLEPT some in the forenoon, leaning back in the one comfortable library chair which my mediaeval plan of furnishing could not banish. Later I telephoned to Capt. Norrys, who came over and helped me explore the sub-cellar.

Absolutely nothing untoward was found, although we could not repress a thrill at the knowledge that this vault was built by Roman hands. Every low arch and massive pillar was Roman—not the debased Romanesque of the bungling Saxons, but the severe and harmonious classicism of the age of the Caesars; indeed, the walls abounded with inscriptions familiar to the antiquarians who had repeatedly explored

the place—things like "P. GETAE. PROP . . . TEMP . . . DONA . . ." and "L. PRAEC . . . VS . . . PONTIFI . . . ATYS . . ."

The reference to Atys made me shiver, for I had read Catullus and knew something of the hideous rites of the Eastern god, whose worship was so mixed with that of Cybele. Norrys and I, by the light of lanterns, tried to interpret the odd and nearly effaced designs on certain irregularly rectangular blocks of stone generally held to be altars, but could make nothing of them. We remembered that one pattern, a sort of rayed sun, was held by students to imply a non-Roman origin, suggesting that these altars had merely been adopted by the Roman priests from some older and perhaps aboriginal temple on the same site. On one of these blocks were some brown stains which made me wonder. The largest, in the center of the room, had certain features on the upper surface which indicated its connection with fire—probably burnt offerings.

Such were the sights in that crypt before whose door the cats had howled, and where Norrys and I now determined to pass the night. Couches were brought down by the servants, who were told not to mind any nocturnal actions of the cats, and Nigger-Man was admitted as much for help as for companionship. We decided to keep the great oak door—a modern replica with slits for ventilation—tightly closed; and, with this attended to, we retired with lanterns still burning to await whatever might occur.

The vault was very deep in the foundations of the priory, and undoubtedly far down on the face of the beetling limestone cliff overlooking the waste valley. That it had been the goal of the scuffling and unexplainable rats I could not doubt, though why, I could not tell. As we lay there expectantly, I found my vigil occasionally mixed with half-formed dreams from which the uneasy motions of the cat across my feet would rouse me.

These dreams were not wholesome, but horribly like the one I had had the night before. I saw again the twilit grotto, and the swineherd with his unmentionable fungous beasts wallowing in filth, and as I looked at these things they seemed nearer and more distinct—so distinct that I could almost observe their features. Then I did observe the flabby features of one of them—and awaked with such a scream that Nigger-Man started up, whilst Capt. Norrys, who had not slept, laughed considerably. Norrys might have laughed more—or perhaps less—had he known what it was that made me scream. But I did not remember myself till later. Ultimate horror often paralyzes memory in a merciful way.

Norrys waked me when the phenomena began. Out of the same frightful dream I was called by his gentle shaking and his urging to listen to the cats. Indeed, there was much to listen to, for beyond the closed door at the head of the stone steps was a veritable nightmare of feline yelling and clawing, whilst Nigger-Man, unmindful of his kindred outside, was running excitedly around the bare stone walls, in which I heard the same babel of scurrying rats that had troubled me the night before.

An acute terror now rose within me, for here were anomalies which nothing normal could well explain. These rats, if not the creatures of a madness which I shared with the cats alone, must be burrowing and sliding in Roman walls I had thought to be of solid limestone blocks . . . unless perhaps the action of water through more than seventeen centuries had eaten winding tunnels which rodent bodies had worn clear and ample . . . But even so, the spectral horror was no less; for if these were living vermin why did not Norrys hear their disgusting commotion? Why did he urge me to watch Nigger-Man and listen to the cats outside, and why did he guess wildly and vaguely at what could have aroused them?

By the time I had managed to tell him, as rationally as I could, what I thought I was hearing, my ears gave me the last fading impression of the scurrying; which had retreated *still downward*, far underneath this deepest of sub-cellars till it seemed as if the whole cliff below were riddled with questing rats. Norrys was not as skeptical as I had anticipated, but instead seemed profoundly moved. He motioned to me to notice that the cats at the door had ceased their clamor, as if giving up the rats for lost; whilst Nigger-Man had a burst of renewed restlessness, and was clawing frantically around the bottom of the large stone altar in the center of the room, which was nearer Norrys' couch than mine.

My fear of the unknown was at this point very great. Something astounding had occurred, and I saw that Capt. Norrys, a younger, stouter, and presumably more naturally materialistic man, was affected fully as much as myself—perhaps because of his lifelong and intimate familiarity with local legend. We could for the moment do nothing but watch the old black cat as he pawed with decreasing fervor at the base of the altar, occasionally looking up and mewing to me in that persuasive manner which he used when he wished me to perform some favor for him.

Norrys now took a lantern close to the altar and examined the place where Nigger-Man was pawing; silently kneeling and scraping away the lichens of centuries which joined the massive pre-Roman block to the tesselated floor. He did not find anything, and was about to abandon his efforts when I noticed a trivial circumstance which made me shudder, even though it implied nothing more than I had already imagined.

I told him of it, and we both looked at its almost imperceptible manifestation with the fixedness of fascinated discovery and acknowledgment. It was only this—that the flame of the lantern set down near the altar was slightly but certainly flickering from a draught of air which it had not before received, and which came indubitably from the crevice between floor and altar where Norrys was scraping away the lichens.

WE spent the rest of the night in the brilliantly-lighted study, nervously discussing what we should do next. The discovery that some vault deeper than the deepest known masonry of the Romans underlay this accursed pile; some vault unsuspected by the curious antiquarians of three centuries; would have been sufficient to excite us without any background of the sinister. As it was, the fascination became twofold; and we paused in doubt whether to abandon our search and quit the priory forever in superstitious caution, or to gratify our sense of adventure and brave whatever horrors might await us in the unknown depths.

By morning we had compromised, and decided to go to London to gather a group of archaeologists and scientific men fit to cope with the mystery. It should be mentioned that before leaving the sub-cellar we had vainly tried to move the central altar which we now recognized as the gate to a new pit of nameless fear. What secret would open the gate, wiser men than we would have to find.

During many days in London Capt. Norrys and I presented our facts, conjectures, and legendary anecdotes to five eminent authorities, all men who could be trusted to respect any family disclosures which future explorations might develop. We found most of them little disposed to scoff, but, instead, intensely interested and sincerely sympathetic. It is hardly necessary to name them all, but I may say that they in-

cluded Sir William Brinton, whose excavations in the Troad excited most of the world in their day. As we all took the train for Anchester I felt myself poised on the brink of frightful revelations, a sensation symbolized by the air of mourning among the many Americans at the unexpected death of the President on the other side of the world.

ON the evening of August 7th we reached Exham Priory, where the servants assured me that nothing unusual had occurred. The cats, even old Nigger-Man, had been perfectly placid; and not a trap in the house had been sprung. We were to begin exploring on the following day, awaiting which I assigned well-appointed rooms to all my guests.

I myself retired in my own tower chamber, with Nigger-Man across my feet. Sleep came quickly, but hideous dreams assailed me. There was a vision of a Roman feast like that of Trimalchio, with a horror in a covered platter. Then came that damnable, recurrent thing about the swineherd and his filthy drove in the twilit grotto. Yet when I awoke it was full daylight, with normal sounds in the house below. The rats, living or spectral, had not troubled me; and Nigger-Man was still quietly asleep. On going down, I found that the same tranquillity had prevailed elsewhere; a condition which one of the assembled savants—a fellow named Thornton, devoted to the psychic—rather absurdly laid to the fact that I had now been shown the thing which certain forces had wished to show me.

All was now ready, and at 11 a. m. our entire group of seven men, bearing powerful electric searchlights and implements of excavation, went down to the sub-cellar and bolted the door behind us. Nigger-Man was with us, for the investigators found no occasion to despise his excitability, and were indeed anxious that he be present in case of obscure rodent manifestations. We noted the Roman inscriptions and unknown altar designs only briefly, for three of the savants had already seen them, and all knew their characteristics. Prime attention was paid to the momentous central altar, and within an hour Sir William Brinton had caused it to tilt backward, balanced by some unknown species of counterweight.

There now lay revealed such a horror as would have overwhelmed us had we not been prepared. Through a nearly square opening in the tiled floor, sprawling on a flight of stone steps so prodigiously worn that it was little more than an inclined plane at the center, was a ghastly array of human or semi-human bones. Those which retained their collocation as skeletons showed attitudes of panic fear, and over all were the marks of rodent gnawing. The skulls denoted nothing short of utter idiocy, cretinism, or primitive semi-apedom.

Above the hellishly littered steps arched a descending passage seemingly chiseled from the solid rock, and conducting a current of air. This current was not a sudden and noxious rush as from a closed vault, but a cool breeze with something of freshness in it. We did not pause long, but shiveringly began to clear a passage down the steps. It was then that Sir William, examining the hewn walls, made the odd observation that the passage, according to the direction of the strokes, must have been chiseled *from beneath*.

I MUST be very deliberate now, and choose my words.

After ploughing down a few steps amidst the gnawed bones we saw that there was light ahead; not any mystic phosphorescence, but a filtered daylight which could not come except from unknown fissures in the cliff that overlooked the waste valley. That such fissures had escaped notice from outside was hardly remarkable, for not only is the valley wholly uninhabited, but the cliff is so high and beetling that only an aeronaut could study its face in detail. A few steps more, and our breaths were literally snatched from us by what we saw; so literally that Thornton, the psychic investigator, actually fainted in the arms of the dazed man who stood behind him. Norrys, his plump face utterly white and flabby, simply cried out inarticulately; whilst I think that what I did was to gasp or hiss, and cover my eyes.

The man behind me—the only one of the party older than I—croaked the hackneyed "My God!" in the most cracked voice I ever head. Of seven cultivated men, only Sir William Brinton retained his composure, a thing the more to his credit because he led the party and must have seen the sight first.

It was a twilit grotto of enormous height, stretching away farther than any eye could see; a subterraneous world of limitless mystery and horrible suggestion. There were buildings and other architectural remains—in one terrified glance I saw a weird pattern of tumuli, a savage circle of monoliths, a low-domed Roman ruin, a sprawling Saxon pile, and an early English edifice of wood—but all these were dwarfed by the ghoulish spectacle presented by the general surface of the ground. For yards about the steps extended an insane tangle of human bones, or bones at least as human as those on the steps. Like a foamy sea they stretched, some fallen apart, but others wholly or partly articulated as skeletons; these latter invariably in postures of daemoniac frenzy, either fighting off some menace or clutching other forms with cannibal intent.

When Dr. Trask, the anthropologist, stooped to classify the skulls, he found a degraded mixture which utterly baffled him. They were mostly lower than the Piltdown man in the scale of evolution, but in every case definitely human. Many were of higher grade, and a very few were the skulls of supremely and sensitively developed types. All the bones were gnawed, mostly by rats, but somewhat by others of the half-human drove. Mixed with them were many tiny bones of rats—fallen members of the lethal army which closed the ancient epic.

I wonder that any man among us lived and kept his sanity through that hideous day of discovery. Not Hoffman or Huysmans could conceive a scene more wildly incredible, more frenetically repellent, or more Gothically grotesque than the twilit grotto through which we seven staggered; each stumbling on revelation after revelation, and trying to keep for the nonce from thinking of the events which must have taken place there three hundred, or a thousand, or two thousand, or ten thousand years ago. It was the antechamber of hell, and poor Thornton fainted again when Trask told him that some of the skeleton things must have descended as quadrupeds through the last twenty or more generations.

HORROR piled on horror as we began to interpret the architectural remains. The quadruped things—with their occasional recruits from the biped class—had been kept in stone pens, out of which they must have broken in their last delirium of hunger or rat-fear. There had been great herds of them, evidently fattened on the coarse vegetables whose remains could be found as a sort of poisonous ensilage at the bottom of huge stone bins older than Rome. I knew now why my ancestors had had such excessive gardens—would to heaven I could forget! The purpose of the herds I did not have to ask.

Sir William, standing with his searchlight in the Roman ruin, translated aloud the most shocking ritual I have ever known; and told of the diet of the antediluvian cult which the priests of Cybele found and mingled with their

own. Norrys, used as he was to the trenches, could not walk straight when he came out of the English building. It was a butcher shop and kitchen—he had expected that—but it was too much to see familiar English implements in such a place, and to read familiar English *graffiti* there, some as recent as 1610. I could not go in that building—that building whose daemon activities were stopped only by the dagger of my ancestor Walter de la Poer.

What I did venture to enter was the low Saxon building, whose oaken door had fallen, and there I found a terrible row of ten stone cells with rusty bars. Three had tenants, all skeletons of high grade, and on the bony forefinger of one I found a seal ring with my own coat-of-arms. Sir William found a vault with far older cells below the Roman chapel, but these cells were empty. Below them was a low crypt with cases of formally arranged bones, some of them bearing terrible parallel inscriptions carved in Latin, Greek, and the tongue of Phrygia.

Meanwhile, Dr. Trask had opened one of the prehistoric tumuli, and brought to light skulls which were slightly more human than a gorilla's, and which bore indescribable ideographic carvings. Through all this horror my cat stalked unperturbed. Once I saw him monstrously perched atop a mountain of bones, and wondered at the secrets that might lie behind his yellow eyes.

Having grasped to some slight degree the frightful revelations of this twilit area—an area so hideously foreshadowed by my recurrent dream—we turned to that apparently boundless depth of midnight cavern where no ray of light from the cliff could penetrate. We shall never know what sightless Stygian worlds yawn beyond the little distance we went, for it was decided that such secrets are not good for mankind. But there was plenty to engross us close at hand, for we had not gone far before the searchlights showed that accursed infinity of pits in which the rats had feasted, and whose sudden lack of replenishment had driven the ravenous rodent army first to turn on the living herds of starving things, and then to burst forth from the priory in that historic orgy of devastation which the peasants will never forget.

God! those carrion black pits of sawed, picked bones and opened skulls! Those nightmare chasms choked with the pithecanthropoid, Celtic, Roman, and English bones of countless unhallowed centuries! Some of them were full, and none can say how deep they had once been. Others were still bottomless to our searchlights, and peopled by unnamable fancies. What, I thought, of the hapless rats that stumbled into such traps amidst the blackness of their quests in this grisly Tartarus?

Once my foot slipped near a horribly yawning brink, and I had a moment of ecstatic fear. I must have been musing a long time, for I could not see any of the party but the plump Capt. Norrys. Then there came a sound from that inky, boundless, farther distance that I thought I knew; and I saw my old black cat dart past me like a winged Egyptian god, straight into the illimitable gulf of the unknown. But I was not far behind, for there was no doubt after another second. It was the eldritch scurrying of those fiend-born rats, always questing for new horrors, and determined to lead me on even unto those grinning caverns of earth's center where Nyarlathotep, the mad faceless god, howls blindly in the darkness to the piping of two amorphous idiot flute-players.

My searchlight expired, but still I ran. I heard voices, and yowls, and echoes, but above all there gently rose that impious, insidious scurrying; gently rising, rising, as a stiff bloated corpse gently rises above an oily river that flows under endless onyx bridges to a black, putrid sea.

SOMETHING bumped into me—something soft and plump. It must have been the rats; the viscous, gelatinous, ravenous army that feast on the dead and the living . . . Why shouldn't rats eat a de la Poer as a de la Poer eats forbidden things? . . . The war ate my boy, damn them all . . . and the Yanks ate Carfax with flames and burnt Grandsire Delapore and the secret . . . No, no, I tell you, I am *not* that dæmon swineherd in the twilit grotto! It was *not* Edward Norrys' fat face on that flabby, fungous thing! Who says I am a de la Poer? He lived, but my boy died! . . . Shall a Norrys hold the lands of a de la Poer? . . . It's voodoo, I tell you . . . that spotted snake . . . Curse you, Thornton, I'll teach you to faint at what my family do! . . . . 'Sblood, thou stinkard, I'll learn ye how to gust . . . wolde ye swynke me thilke wys? . . . *Magna Mater! Magna Mater! . . . Atys . . . Dia ad aghaidh 's ad aodaun . . . agus bas dunach ort! Dhonas 's dholas ort, agus leat-sa! . . . Ungl . . . nngl . . . rrrlh . . . chchch* . . . .

That is what they say I said when they found me in the blackness after three hours; found me crouching in the blackness over the plump, half-eaten body of Captain Norrys, with my own cat leaping and tearing at my throat. Now they have blown up Exham Priory, taken my Nigger-Man away from me, and shut me into this barred room at Hanwell with fearful whispers about my heredity and experiences. Thornton is in the next room, but they prevent me from talking to him. They are trying, too, to suppress most of the facts concerning the priory. When I speak of poor Norrys they accuse me of a hideous thing, but they must know that I did not do it. They must know it was the rats; the slithering, scurrying rats whose scampering will never let me sleep; the dæmon rats that race behind the padding in this room and beckon me down to greater horrors than I have ever known; the rats they can never hear; the rats, the rats in the walls!

THE VOICE OF EUPHEMIA

A Strange Tale of the Spirit World

By EUDORA RAMSAY RICHARDSON

"AND you really believe," I asked, "that you can transmit your thoughts to a girl six hundred miles away?"

"I have always communicated with Euphemia when we were separated," Percy Lagare replied earnestly. "Through all my childhood she was my only friend. Euphemia and I have shared everything—even our thoughts."

"Give me some proof," I suggested. "What is Euphemia doing now?"

Percy made no immediate answer. In his eyes there came that faraway look that set him apart from the other boys in our university. The incident occurred, as I now vividly recall, in the twilight of a late October evening. We were sitting on a balcony that overlooked the back campus. It was not a cheerful scene that lay before us, the trees bare-limbed and gaunt above a carpet of seared leaves, the sky losing its last glow of daylight. Suddenly Lagare's rapt expression gave place to one of extreme terror. Clutching my hand and seeming not to see me, he cried out sharply. Then, for the space of five minutes, the longest I have ever endured, he was silent. And then:

"She is safe now, but she has been in great danger, calling upon me for help. I can never see her. I can only hear the messages she sends," he said.

That evening Lagare seemed shaken, though not in fear for Euphemia's safety. I was entirely unconvinced, however, until he brought me, two days later, a letter from Euphemia telling of a narrow escape from drowning. The experience, I remember, rendered me decidedly uncomfortable. A practical boy of nineteen, I was little interested in psychic phenomena. I was interested, however, in Percy Lagare. He was my David and I his Jonathan—the only close friend Lagare had on the campus.

In appearance, in taste, in fineness of sensibility, Lagare was different from the other boys. There was about him a classical beauty reminiscent of Greek art. Tall and slightly built he was, with an abundance of fair hair that swept back from a forehead high and broad. He was at college only one year, and during that time was as completely untouched by the life about him as were the chaste marble statues in the foyer. I thought him very lonely until he told me of Euphemia.

Euphemia was the woman he loved, the woman who loved him, and who knew scarcely another man. For generations Lagare's family and Euphemia's had lived on island plantations off the coast of South Carolina, isolated from the mainland, but accessible by row boat to each other. They made few trips to the mainland, but the little boats, for two hundred years, had, with unbroken frequency, crossed the narrow channel that separated the two islands.

Sons and daughters had been tutored at home, and then sent abroad to complete their education. Though the Hugers and Lagares were not prolific people, there had always been a son of each who had carried on the name. Now Percy represented the last of the Lagares and Euphemia the last of the Hugers.

When my friend first mentioned Euphemia to me, he said that he had always loved her. Having no other playmates, like Ferdinand and Miranda, they had, through each other, discovered the existence of love. Their mothers, the closest friends, had, before their births, Lagare told me, spent hours together anticipating the arrival of their children. Percy and Euphemia were born during one of the frightful equinoctial storms so prevalent off the southern coast.

"Old Jeremiah, our household servant," Lagare told me one day, when he had lapsed into a story-telling mood, "loves to talk of that night.

" 'Yo' sho' is meant fo' sumpin' turrible, Marse Pu'sy,' he said. 'When I heared yo' liftin' up yo' voice 'ginst de elements o' de Lawd, I says to yo' pa dat he best consecrate dat young un, dat de debbil done sont his spell on him. But, praise Gawd, effen yo' ain't broke up de tempest and save us, Marse Pu'sy.' "

Stranger to me, however, than Jeremiah's interpretations of the night was the psychic communication that passed between Percy's mother and Euphemia's.

"My mother," Lagare continued, "felt that her spirit went out to meet her friend's, and she knew that Euphemia was born. When she described her experiences to Mrs. Huger, she found that Euphemia's mother, too, had been conscious of the same merging of spirit."

As far as Lagare knew, this was the only psychic experience of which the two women had been conscious. The fact, however, that his mother, in perfect health, had died at precisely the time that Mrs. Huger, a consumptive, had died, led him to believe that there was much that had not been told him.

Those portions of the sciences that border on the abstruse interested Lagare. Wireless telegraphy and telephony he regarded as the means by which physical barriers were to be erased.

LAGARE did not re-enter the university the following fall. It seemed to me altogether right that he should return to his plantation, his books, and to Euphemia, whom he soon married. As for me, I anticipated with eagerness the time when I might visit them in their island home. Winters, however, were filled with college activities, and during the sultry sea island summers the Lagares roamed, Nomad fashion, in Alaska and the Canadian Rockies.

Then came the war and for me American cantonments and France. Percy Lagare volunteered, but, on account of underweight and a certain fragility of appearance, he was rejected.

It was, therefore, not until the fall of 1918 that I visited the plantation. Lagare, accompanied by the faithful Jeremiah, met me on the mainland and carried me across in his motor-boat. In the late afternoon we tied to the pier and walked together through the sandy paths arched by great pines from which hung the tropical gray moss. Stretching as far as the eye could see, lay fields still white with unpicked cotton, dotted here and there by the bright bandannas and gay shirts of the negroes who were filling their crocus bags. The house was large and impressive, after the manner of pioneer colonial architecture, with pillars and a piazza as a happy after-thought.

It was flanked on both sides by rows of white-washed cabins. Restrained elegance and prosperity characterized the picture.

Euphemia greeted us, descending the wide front steps and holding out her hands. If I were an artist of the impressionistic school, I should paint Euphemia as I saw her that day, all eyes and hair—eyes dark and burning, in a setting of light and shadow, hair blacker than the raven's wing and far more lustrous, coiled on a neck milk white and bare throated.

The room to which Percy and Euphemia led me was in keeping with the rest of the house. Here, as elsewhere, antique mahogany bespoke an inheritance of culture and affluence.

"This room was my mother's," Percy explained, "and that is her picture above the mirror. I leave it here because it seems to make the room still hers."

The face of Laetitia Lagare was beautiful, with a beauty that challenged one to define its source. I felt strangely possessed with a sense of kinship to the dead woman.

"How lovely your mother is," I said, "and how like you!"

"There never was between two people more nearly perfect understanding," he said, "than between my mother and me—except between Euphemia and me."

"I loved her, and she loved me," Euphemia said gently, and then added with a smile, "but she grew a bit jealous of me, didn't she, Percy?"

"Perhaps," Lagare said, "but mothers are human, and only divine love knows no jealousy."

As the weeks passed, I spent an absurd amount of time before the portrait of Percy's mother, and I began to understand how it is that men have gone mad because of the pictured face of a woman. Never had I felt myself so in the grip of another's personality. I was to find later that this obsession remained with me long after my departure from the island.

I had been only a short time with the Lagares when I realized that Euphemia was ill, and that the bright spots that glowed upon her cheeks evidenced the ravages of the disease to which her mother had been a victim. One evening, when the three of us were sitting before a fire of fragrant dried pine, Euphemia began to talk earnestly of death. There was in her voice a never-to-be-forgotten quality that lent dignity even to the most casual things she said—a deep-toned resonance soft as the southern air she breathed.

"I used to dread the coming of death," she said, "because I thought it meant separation from Percy. Now I know that a union like ours can know no end."

Lagare's hand closed over his wife's. I saw, as I searched his face, that he knew how inevitable was the end, and I guessed the reason for those long visits to other altitudes.

"You mean," I asked, "that you have faith in communication after death?"

"Yes," Euphemia replied. "Just how I should find a way to reach Percy I do not know. Perhaps in our experiments with wireless telephony we are nearing the solution of the problem."

It occurred to me then that Percy's consuming interest in the progress of radio, an interest that had resulted in his becoming one of the best operators in the country, had had its beginning in his dread of separation from Euphemia.

AT the end of my visit, when Euphemia waved her farewell to me, I felt that I should not see her again. In the months that followed, however, my mind turned more frequently to the portrait of Percy's mother than to the other friends I had left on the island, and the sense of nearness to the dead woman deepened with time.

Soon Lagare wrote that he was taking his wife to the far west in the hope of defeating her malady. Then followed the losing fight. Letters came from both of them, brave, gay, sad letters that tore at my heart strings. Then this telegram:

> "Euphemia is dead. God give me courage. Percy Lagare."

My first thought was for the reason of the man left so utterly desolate. It was not possible for me to join Lagare upon his arrival at the plantation. Six weeks later, however, my affairs made ready for a long absence, I started South. It had now been more than three years since I had seen my friend, and I feared the changes I might find.

Again Lagare met me, accompanied by Jeremiah. Except for a clearer pallor and deeper shadows beneath his eyes, Percy seemed very much the same, but Jeremiah was different. While his master busied himself with the motor of the boat, the old negro beckoned me aside.

" 'Fo' Gawd, Marse Rogers," he said, "dey's sperrits on tap dat island. Dem niggahs is all flew. Effen I hadn't prommus Marse Pussy's pa to brung him up, I'd a bin gone too."

"Have you and Mr. Lagare been on the plantation alone?" I asked.

"Yassa, Marse Pussy he done discha'ge de oberseah day 'fo' yastiddy—say dey ain't no use o' him 'dout no hands to wuk. Me an' him an' de sperrits—dat's all on de island, an' dis niggah is gone now. I'se tellin' yo', Marse Rogers."

Percy untied the boat and called to us that he was ready.

"Aren't you coming, Jeremiah?" he asked.

The old darkey shook his head, and the tears streamed down the furrows of his face.

"It's de debbil's wuk, Marse Pussy. I done tole yo' de debbil brung yo' dat night yo' wuz bawned. Fo' Gawd, Marse Pussy, leab dat ha'nted island."

Lagare smiled sadly as he started the engine.

"All right. Take care of yourself, Jeremiah. We'll look you up when we come ashore," he said.

We chugged away, and far out we could still hear the lamentations of Jeremiah.

Reaching the island, I was amazed by its utter desolation, unprepared as I was for the rapidity with which vegetation grows under the semi-tropical sun and for the completeness with which the humid heat destroys all evidence of paint upon the buildings. Stubby underbrush clogged the paths. Dried cotton stalks, from which the yellowing bolls had not been picked, attempted to rise among the weeds that enveloped them. The house, after its years of disrepair and unattended summers in the blistering southern sun, was devoid of paint and care. The rains of several seasons had washed from the cabins all the whiteness that on my former visit had given them an appearance of sanitary well being.

It was twilight when we picked our way through the path and entered the house. Lagare explained that the electric lighting system was out of order; and, in the absence of lamps, he lighted the tall candles provided for the ancestral candelabra. The high-ceilinged rooms, their heavy mahogany furniture and shadowy corners, assumed an aspect of weirdness that made me quite realize why, following a death, the superstitious blacks had embarked for more cheerful quarters. There descended upon me an unreasoning foreboding of evil. As darkness deepened, I was conscious of fear, and of a desire to leave the plantation and mingle with the throngs under the glare of city lights.

"It was the radio," Lagare explained to me as we sat before the great log fire that night, "that frightened the negroes

away. Before we went West the instrument, as you know, had not reached so high a state of perfection. I have been working with the machine all these years, and upon my return began at once to modernize my equipment. One night I had just tuned in on a concert when Jeremiah entered. There had already been in the cabins strange reports of happenings here. So when Jeremiah carried back the news of the voices I was listening to, there was an exodus which I could not stay."

"You are in a far better frame of mind," I said, "than I expected to find you."

"Yes," Lagare answered, "I am not unhappy, and, despite being here alone, not lonely. You see I have Euphemia with me always."

"You mean," I asked, "that you have established communication with the spirit world?"

"Yes, a mental communication that brings peace to me—nothing more. I do feel sometimes that I must hear her voice, see her face, but the madness that this longing brings does not last. I know that some day in some way she will speak to me."

Then Lagare fell silent, and the rest of the evening we sat, talking now and then, but for the most part watching the smouldering and spitting of the great logs.

At midnight by the light of one of the candles, Lagare led me to the room I had formerly occupied. The immense four poster, with its draperies and side curtains, the gigantic highboy and massive bureau that caught and held the shadows would, I think, have been terrifying to a more hardy occupant than I. From out the portrait above the mirror the eyes of Laetitia Lagare found and followed me. In the dimly-lighted room the white draperies seemed to flutter with the candle's flickerings, giving to me an uncanny sense of the nearness of Laetitia Lagare. Oddly enough, I welcomed the portrait as the one bit of reality in this mansion of past greatness. As soon as possible I burrowed beneath the coverings of the bed. Outside, the wind from the sea screamed as it cut its way through the pines; every shutter clattered on rusty hinges; loosely fitting windows rattled, and warped old boards creaked their gloomy accompaniment.

Then, just at what hour I do not know, a flutter that might have been made by the wings of a fairy passed my door. Then there was the sound of Lagare's door being gently opened and of something entering. I raised myself upon my elbow and listened. At first I heard only the howling of the wind and the shaking of the old house. At length, from Lagare's room someone seemed to be tiptoeing down stairs. I was certain that I heard the click of the radio in the room below, and then for hours there was no sound save the eerie noises of the night. At last I slept the sleep of exhaustion.

TWICE the next day I was about to tell Lagare of the happenings of the night before, but the gaunt, drawn look on his face, and the starry light in his eyes, deterred me. Surely I had come to comfort my friend, not to harass him. I did, however, that day begin urging Percy to leave the island and come home with me.

"Later," he replied earnestly, "later, but not now."

I said no more that day, but I found myself continually dreading the approach of darkness. Undoubtedly, in a house so old, so large, one's overwrought nerves could give various interpretations to the noises of the night. Hence I determined to investigate anything that was not self-explanatory. Entering the room just before midnight, I sought the eyes of Laetitia Lagare, and from their steady gaze there seemed to flow into me a courage for whatever undertaking might seem necessary. On the table by my bed I placed a lighted candle and waited.

It was just at midnight that again I heard a fluttering past my room and the sound of Lagare's door being gently opened, and later someone creeping down the stairs. I rose and prepared to follow the sounds. The candle I carried was insufficient to pierce the blackness, which, as I entered the hall, seemed to close in upon me with strangling intensity. The weak, old balustrade trembled as I grasped it for support. Sickly lines of pale light outlined the living-room door, but from within came no sound to relieve the ghastly stillness.

In the hall I paused, trying to still the wild pumping of my heart. Then, noiselessly, I opened the door and peered into the room. In the far corner a candle cast its wan light, and there before the radio knelt Percy Lagare, an agony of earnestness on his face. So the footsteps of the stair were explained, but not the sounds that preceded Percy's descent.

From the vantage ground of the darkened hall, I watched for a moment, unnoticed. Lagare was listening, it appeared, for a voice that did not come, hoping against hope, fighting despair and hopelessness. Looking up, he saw me.

"Oh, I am sorry," he said, with the quick thought for others that marked his every act. "I am sorry to have disturbed you, Henry."

"Why do you do this every night," I asked, "wearing yourself out to no avail?"

"It will not always be to no avail," he answered, pathetic eagerness in his voice. "Some day I shall hear, and then there will be rest. Until then I must listen."

"You believe she will reach you over the radio?"

"She believed that she could. Now I have the strongest amplifier that has been made, and I have experimented with many wave lengths. Sometimes I am sure that the first syllable of my name is being pronounced, and then there comes insistent interference as though the voice were being intercepted. Sometimes I feel that the interference must be in the spirit world."

"I must hear her, I must," he added in a fervor of earnestness. "If you love me, Henry, leave me alone."

I obeyed and returned to my room.

AS time passed, other changes in Lagare were evident. He ate little, and, instead of taking the walks that were his custom, sat idly on the piazza or before the fire. It was, moreover, the glow in his eyes that alarmed me most. They were not the eyes of a normal human being, nor yet the eyes of a madman; they were the eyes of one seeing into a world beyond and jealously striving to see further. Each night there came the soft flutter past my door, the sound of someone entering Lagare's room and then the almost noiseless descending of the stairs and the *click* of the wireless instrument.

I had become sufficiently accustomed to the routine to return to my regular habits of sleep, when one night I was awakened by the opening of my door. I felt certain that someone entered and hovered over my bed. I lay quiet in the utter stillness of the room.

Soon afterward there came the flutter in the hall and the creaking of the steps. The noises emitted by the radio I would swear were different from those I had heard on other nights. Numb and awed, I lay awake until I heard the returning footsteps on the stairs.

All the following day Lagare seemed more than ever abstracted, and the food he prepared for me he scarcely touched.

It was quite evident now that neither Lagare nor I could much longer stand the strain of nights on the desolate island; hence I argued valiantly in behalf of immediate departure.

"Percy," I said, as we sat before the fire at twilight, "this is the last night I am going to remain in this place, and you are coming away with me tomorrow."

Lagare's head rested wearily against the carved back of the fine old Chippendale chair, and bluish gray lids closed over his eyes.

"After tonight I will do as you say. Surely after tonight it will be possible for me to leave. Oh, I am tired, so tired! After tonight you may take me away, but tonight I must be here."

I retired early, hoping that before midnight I might get some of the rest I needed. Lagare's last words, running over and over in my mind, gripped by a sickening fear, I lay staring into the darkness about me. Shutters clattered. A dead branch fell to the ground. Waves beat against the sands of the beach. A flash of lightning intensified the shadows of the room. Then rain added its din to the noises of the southern midwinter storm.

To still the beating of my heart I repeated senseless jingles dormant in memory since childhood. On and on I went in a futile effort to drown fear. Then I seemed to know that the door had been opened and to feel someone hovering over my bed. Minutes like hours went by, while the presence lingered. There was the nightly fluttering past my door —and still the presence lingered.

I remember making one last effort to bring reason to my rescue. Was it a spirit that held me powerless to resist? If so, was there another passing my door and entering Lagare's room? Then my mind went blank, and, acting no longer, merely registered impressions. I could hear Lagare running down the stairs.

The radio whirred, crashed, hissed. Then I felt myself taken gently by the shoulders and propelled toward the steps and down.

Down, down I was going, powerless to resist, down through the blackness, perhaps to some doom awaiting me, past fear, past hope, dominated by the unknown, possessed by another. The grip relaxed as we reached the room in which the instrument had been placed. By the light of a single candle I saw Lagare kneeling before the radio, straining every nerve to catch the slightest sound. Cold and numb, still in the grip of the force that had brought me down, I watched my friend as he listened.

Then through the amplifier there came the never-to-be-forgotten voice of Euphemia Lagare, summing up in its soul-hunger all the love the woman heart has felt for its mate and left unexpressed.

"Percy! Percy!" came the voice.

Lightning sent its jagged forks through the sky. Thunder crashed. The radio whirred in angry accompaniment. From out the stillness that followed, another voice, that seemed to be linked with all my dreams and all my yearnings, came clear and sweet—the voice of motherhood, the same yesterday, today and forever, the voice of all mothers of all ages:

"Henry Rogers, Henry Rogers," were the words it said. *"I am Percy's mother. Save my boy."*

There followed crashes of the elements, stranger sounds from the instrument, noises that could be likened only to immortal souls in mortal conflict. At length, commanding and triumphant, came the voice of Euphemia Lagare:

"Percy, Percy, I want you. Come to me."

With the cry of "Euphemia! Beloved!" Percy Lagare fell at my feet, on his face the peace of one who has come to the end of his journey and found rest.

Advice on Marriage

"MARRY in your own class if you would insure married happiness."

That is the advice offered by the Rev. Dr. George F. Shepherd, pastor of the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church of Watertown, N. Y., and one of the best know divines of that denomination in New York state.

"My first suggestion is, do not fear poverty," he says. "Too many of our young people think it is necessary for them to start in where their parents left off. It is not necessary when you start in on your married life to have four or five well furnished rooms, with Turkish rugs on the floor. It would be better for a good many of them to start in with a rag rug on the floor, an old cook stove and a few stools, and build up their home through hard work.

"My second suggestion is, marry your own kind. Do not marry outside of your own class, creed or color. I know there are examples of where it has worked out all right, but if you will follow the majority of such cases through to the end you will find that in the long run it is better to marry your own kind.

"Marry on or about the same level where you are. Girls, do not think that the boys that you will find in some other church or in some other city, are any better than those with whom you are now associated. Boys, do not think that the girls to be found elsewhere are any sweeter, or any purer than those to be found in your own class.

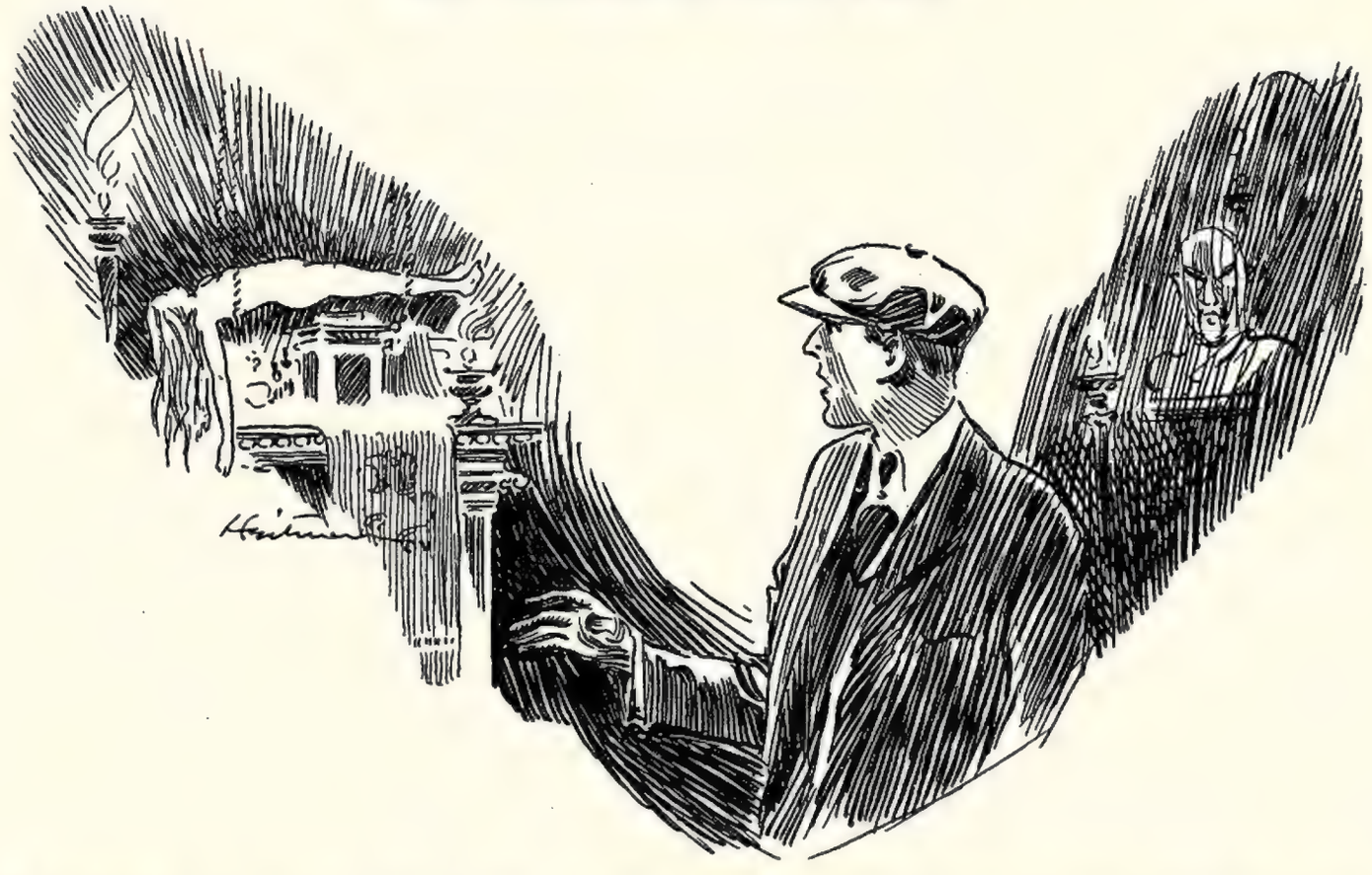
"Third, give what you expect. If you expect of your wife purity do not bring to her a heart that has been stained. A woman demands above all else undivided love. They often say that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. 'Feed the brute' is a common expression.

"But you cannot cure the ache in a woman's heart by that method. You cannot bring home a box of candy at the close of the day, or keep flowers on the stand and let that suffice. You cannot make your wife happy by buying her trinkets. She wants them, but what she wants above all is undivided affection."

Here's a Truly Remarkable Story of Oriental Mysticism

YELLOW AND WHITE

By GEORGE FULLER



MEETING your one-time inseparable college chum, after a lapse of ten years, is a dubious adventure. College memories are tinselly things; resurrected suddenly. They have a fashion of giving the lie to the aura of glory which surrounds the thought of Alma Mater.

Jimmy Belden was fully aware of this fact. He had met others of his former college mates during that decade, men he had not seen for years. And he had come to know that, while the boy is father to the man, the family resemblance is sometimes surprisingly remote. But the change had never been acutely distressing before. It had remained for the best friend of all—keen, clean, virile Arch Pennington—to present the strongest, most disturbing, and yet most baffling impression of having let down into a compromise, of some kind, with "the sort of things no fellow can do." Belden was uncomfortable and puzzled.

During a lull in the conversation, which on both sides had been half formal, half clumsily shaped by wistful attempts to get back to the boyhood footing, he sat taking in his surroundings. Nine years in China had certainly changed "Old Pen," he thought. Even his apartment showed it. The close, incense-burdened air was unlike him. The dim lighting was unlike him. The rich, dull, heavily embroidered draperies, the dark, ivory-and-pearl-inlaid furniture, the gaudily flowered dressing gown—all were utterly, grotesquely unlike him.

But most of all, the incense seemed out of place. Different from any Chinese incense he had ever smelled; sweet, elusive, and insistently penetrative, in some weird fashion it was the soul of the place, the key and expression of every incongruous change. He looked at the heavy table. The incense arose from it. At the silken draperies. It seemed to breathe from their mysterious folds. At the bright silk hosiery, the straw sandals, or at that mandarin's robe, which denied that it was Arch Pennington's face that showed above it. Always it was the incense that was the strongest impression. Jimmy could almost believe that he *saw* it.

"China is a peculiar place. The Chinese are peculiar people," said Pennington abruptly. "Quiet, simple, faithful, generous, trustful—but, with it all, cruel, fanatical, treacherous, and with a habit of thought as unfathomable to the Western mind as the symbolism of Egypt."

He lapsed as abruptly into silence again. Only his lips and eyes had moved as he spoke. The lean, sallow face, with its lustreless skin—"smoke cured by incense," thought Belden—so unlike the former rosy, animated face Jimmy had once known, had not varied the fraction of a line in expression. Only the eyes, quick, wary, changing from cold indifference to dreamy reminiscence, lighting with a sudden uncanny gleam which faded as quickly into a look of dull hopelessness—only the eyes were apart from the Oriental mask which had hidden Arch Pennington.

Belden rose, with a slight shudder.

"I must be going," he said, somewhat uncertainly.

Pennington jumped to his feet with surprising animation, and caught him by the hand.

"Come again, Jimmy, won't you?" he said eagerly. "I—oh, damn it, Jimmy, it's been *great* to see you. I know—I've seen it—I'm strange to you. I just haven't gotten loose from China yet, old man; but I will, after a bit. Come again tomorrow night, won't you?"

Jimmy promised, and left, a sudden warming in his heart for the "Old Pen" who had flashed out from behind his mask for an instant, mingled with shame for his own coolness and distrust.

He came back to the bit of transplanted China the next evening, and the next. Gradually the old intimacy returned, until they were together every spare moment that Belden had. Little by little, the feeling that Pen had lost the "high heart" was dulled by constant contact, as some of his old-time vivacity returned, and Jimmy thoroughly enjoyed his company.

He told, whimsically, inimitably, the most fascinating stories of his unconventional travels, poking around in obscure corners of that ancient, mysterious land. Finally only one barrier to complete friendly confidence seemed to remain—a sense that Arch had approached some directly personal subject and then avoided it skilfully at the last instant.

When Pennington at last brushed the barrier aside, it was with his usual abruptness. They had been indulging, one evening, in the sort of musing, communicative silence which their renewed intimacy made possible, when he unexpectedly spoke.

"I married a Chinese girl," he said.

Belden blinked. "You—*what?*" he gasped, after a dazed silence.

"I married a Chinese girl," repeated Pennington. "Chinese style. Still married, in fact. Married her because I loved her. Still love her. Promised to come back after this visit. She wouldn't believe me."

Jimmy blinked again. Arch sat watching him through narrowing eyelids, the smoke from his cigarette clinging fantastically to his fingers, swaying upward, and wreathing slowly about his face in the still, heavy air. After a moment Jimmy jerked himself together.

"Forgive me, old man," he said quickly. "That was too unexpected for me to understand, all in one lump. Tell me about it."

PENNINGTON'S tense features relaxed. His face had been gathering an unpleasant expression as he waited for Belden's comment.

"It was 'way over in an out-of-the-way corner of southwestern China," he said, "about three years ago. I had been rambling across country in native costume for months. You used to kid me at college, you know, about my Chinese eyes; and a stretch of fever had left me with this beautiful ochre-tinted complexion; so, with my knowledge of the country, I had no trouble passing as a native.

"China had fascinated me from the moment I landed at Hong Kong. For six years I had studied the people. Their dialects, their customs, their facial expressions, their mannerisms, gestures, and costumes—everything Chinese was of the most absorbing interest to me. I almost forgot my American ways. Even in my home, I dressed, thought, lived, *breathed* as a Chinese, until I could pass for one anywhere, without suspicion touching me.

"That was when my travels began. From then on I wandered constantly, living the uncertain but fascinating life of an adventurer, seeking always the most obscure, least-known corners of that obscure, little-known land. For the most part, I passed as a traveling merchant—trading, I must admit, chiefly on my wits, for it was too dangerous to try to carry anything of value.

"Late one afternoon I entered a beautiful little valley in the foothills. The air was full of the sunset glow. Fruit trees and flowers were blossoming everywhere on the rich, carefully terraced hillsides. A village of white walled, red roofed houses clustered around the groves and gardens of a huge, rambling, ornate temple, fire-tipped in the setting sun. I never smelled such wonderful air, or saw such quiet beauty, any place else in the world."

His eyelids drooped and he fell silent, as if he were living over again that faraway afternoon.

"I made up my mind to stay there for awhile," he resumed, after a bit. "I did stay, nearly six months. I found the inhabitants to be a simple rural people, friendly, unsuspicious, and intelligent, and I did a good business—if you could call my short-card, shell-game, fly-by-night operations 'business'. They were in better circumstances than the average Chinese, and it showed not only in their better physical condition, but also in a comelier cast of countenance than usual. Some of the women were really pretty. One of them—Great Guns, man! What are you staring at!"

Belden jumped clear out of his chair.

"Lord, Pen, but you startled me!" he said. "You brought me clear from China in one jerk! What's the matter with you? I was just watching that smoke around your head. It takes some queer shapes."

"The devil it does!" said Pennington, a look of nervous excitement coming over his face. "What does it look like?"

"Why, nothing in particular, I guess. It's just that the smoke hangs forever in this confounded close air of yours, and this incense gets me light-headed. Where do you get that peculiar 'flavor,' anyway? I smell the damned stuff in my sleep."

"I was coming to that," said Pennington, shortly. "Ugh! You gave me the shivers, staring over my head that way. Where was I?"

"You had just begun on the women," said Belden.

"Oh, yes." Arch lapsed into another silence.

"There was one girl I saw one day, going to the temple," he went on, finally. "It was a good while before I risked that, for Oriental temples are not healthy places to be unduly curious about. After a couple of months, though, I felt sure enough of my standing to chance it, and I mixed into the crowd one day when a large number were going. After a bit I noticed her beside me."

He stopped. Jimmy had begun to wonder if he had decided not to tell any more, when:

"Gad, man! She was wonderful!" he said reverently. "No Chinese woman you ever saw gives you any basis for imagining how beautiful she was. She was little, and graceful, and dainty as a bird, but with a full-rounded daintiness that was maddening. I kept close to her as long as I could. She fairly hypnotized me. But the shifting of the crowd separated us, and, try as I would, I couldn't find her again. For weeks I searched for her every place, forgetful of everything else. I probably would have gotten myself into a peck of trouble if it had kept up, for I got to poking into places that weren't safe even for a Chinese, and I must have acted suspiciously. But at last I found her.

"We met by accident, outside the village, and she recognized me with a quick, fluttering, upward glance out of her glorious brown eyes that scattered what few wits I had left. I stopped her, determined not to lose her again. She was incredibly shy, but too utterly innocent to be coquettish; and she had

noticed me that day, as I had her, and before I left her I had her promise that she would meet me that evening if she could. She seemed unreasonably frightened, someway, and yet not at all afraid of *me*.

"Well, no need of a lot of detail; you'll be thinking me a mushy idiot. It was a case with us both, though, of love at first sight, if ever there was such a thing. We met only at night, out of the village; but we met every night that she was able to slip away, which was nearly always, and we lived our lives as if one instant were all of eternity. Ah! those nights! Jimmy, you never saw moonlight! Chinese or not, her flesh was like ivory—not yellow, but like fine ivory, and she was formed like an angel. Well—" he passed his hand wearily over his eyes "—never mind that.

"She was the daughter of a high priest of the temple. That was why she had been so frightened when we first met; men, for her, were absolutely taboo. She was just beginning to serve some sort of novitiate in the temple, which would gradually claim more and more of her time, until she was absorbed body and soul. But the call of the heart was too strong for the bonds of the temple, and she came to me like a bird to its mate. How we ever kept it up as long as we did without being caught, and punished as only the Chinese can punish, I can't imagine. For sheer foolhardiness it beat anything I ever heard of. But I never thought of it, then—maybe that's how I got away with it. At any rate, I did. We were never disturbed.

"I began going to the temple whenever any number of the people went, to get occasional glimpses of her during the day. She was usually gathering flowers in the temple gardens, to be used in making incense. They used mostly the kind of incense I have here; she gave me some of it when I came away. It gives me the shivers, sometimes, but I love it, because it has come to mean *her* to me. They make it from a gorgeous yellow flower, different from any I ever saw, which grows in great beds in the temple gardens. It seemed to grow nowhere in the valley except the temple gardens, and all of the beds there were too far from the public paths for me to examine them closely, although their rich, penetrating odor was everywhere. I used to beg her to bring me some, partly from curiosity, but mostly because their odor was so inseparably connected with her in my mind. She was among them so much that their fragrance was with her always.

"But, although love had conquered her training in most respects, she never would consent to that. When I asked for flowers, a frightened look would come into her eyes and she would murmur, No! No! The incense is good for men, in the temple. The flowers are good for men, in the gardens. But outside they are bad! Bad! You understand, of course, that I am translating for you; she never learned to speak English. Finally I stopped asking her for flowers, it worried her so. I think the work in the flowers was the only part of their religion she understood, although I never questioned her. The rest . . . "

He paused, and a slow, violent shudder shook him from head to foot.

"The rest is too horrible to believe. It is hard to imagine how it could exist in the midst of such beautiful surroundings and among such a superior people. I learned its true significance quite by accident. I was in the temple one day at a sort of festival; nearly everyone in the valley was there. A storm was brewing, and the air was almost intolerably sultry; what with that, and the crowd in the temple, I nearly went to sleep on my feet. I got to watching the smoke as it rose from the altar, and—" he shuddered again, "—it seemed to hang in the air, over the idol, in the form of a gigantic bat."

Jimmy Belden turned cold to his toes, controlling himself only by a mighty effort. Could he be going mad, he thought wildly? For it was the likeness of a *bat* that he had been staring at, in the smoke over Pennington's head, and now, as he glanced furtively upward, he could see it again! Not for worlds would he have had Pennington notice where he was looking; but it required all his will-power to look casually away. A feeling of deathly nausea came over him.

"WELL?" he said hoarsely.

Luckily, Pennington was too absorbed to notice the strangeness in his face and manner.

"Well, it certainly gave me the creeps," he said. "I was primed just exactly right for what followed, and it surely got a world of action out of me! As I said, a storm had ben brewing; and suddenly it burst, with the most unearthly racket I ever heard in my life. It turned pitch dark and the wind screamed like ten million devils. There was no lightning, in the usual sense of the word, but the air was tingling with electricity until it was physically painful, and the thunder was one continuous, deafening, ear-splitting roar. We seemed to be right in the middle of it. Every hair on the back of my hands—every hair on the heads of the people around me—was stiff as a bristle. It was the spookiest thing that ever happened!

"The crowd stood it for about thirty seconds, too scared to wiggle, and then went stark, staring, raving crazy, priests and all, and made a wild rush for the doors—and I don't mind saying that I was the wildest man in the place. In the darkness and excitement I went the wrong way, and—Lord! what a place I got into!

"After passing through several rooms and passages I came into a dimly-lighted inside room, with a peculiar, sickening odor. One glance told me that I was where no one but a priest was safe for a second. The next—br-r-r! I can see it yet!—the next look showed me, hanging from a beam at the other side of the room, a tremendous vampire bat, gorged, and asleep,— and under it—"

He paused, and dropped his head on his hands, his elbows on his knees.

"—under it, hanging limply on the cords which bound it to a post, was the naked body of a young girl—dead—and bled white!"

Belden's breath was whistling through his teeth.

"PRETTY thing, isn't it?" said Pennington, looking up with a crooked grin. "Well, boy! I was the worst scared man in Asia. I don't want to brag, but you can't get any worse scared than I was; if you could, I'd have *been* worse scared. I don't know how I got out of there. I never *would* have gotten out, if anyone had seen me; but the storm had scared everyone clear away from the temple, and it was as dark, outdoors, as the inside of a jug, so no one saw me leaving. I never stopped running until I was clear across the village and out into the fields—not until a thought came to me that drove fear completely out of my mind, leaving nothing but blind rage, horror, and a weakness that tumbled me on my face, gasping."

"You mean—*her?*" asked Belden.

"She wasn't the girl in the temple, if that's what you mean," Pennington replied, "but it was a thought of her that stopped me. It suddenly flashed upon me that they were saving *my* little girl for that horrible, filthy, unspeakable monster—that sooner or later *she* would be bound to that post. I could picture the beast fastened upon that delicate throat, draining the life, and

warmth, and rosy flush—I tell you, for awhile I was a madman!

"Luckily, it was only a short time before I saw her, or I might have done something downright suicidal. The storm had scared her half to death, and her first thought had been to find me. The thunder and lightning had given way to a tremendous downpour of rain, lashed by a furious wind. It was still dark, although only mid-afternoon; but not too dark to see her, coming through the sodden grass with her white, wet, wind-driven robes clinging to her.

"I don't know just how I persuaded her to leave with me. I know I pleaded frantically, for I had the black horrors at the mere thought of her ever going near that temple again, and I realized that the storm was our opportunity. And I remember that for a time I was almost hopeless, her old habits of thought, and her fear of the idol's revenge, were so strong. But love conquered, and we got away safely. Perhaps they thought, when they missed us, that the storm had been sent by the gods to hide their taking her away, and that I was some sort of advance guard; at least, we never saw any sign of pursuit. But we took no chances. Until we were hundreds of miles away we traveled only by night; and we never wasted a minute that we could use for travel, until we reached the coast country—the China that the white man knows.

"Somehow, the sight of Europeans in the coast towns immediately made me consider the question of our relations. I loved her. Jimmy, I *loved* her, I tell you! And I married her—Chinese style, as I said, but I married her just the same, and for two years I was utterly, completely happy."

He got to his feet and began tramping nervously around the room, running his hands through his hair, snapping his fingers, and whistling snatches of music. He was plainly under a terrible strain.

"For two years?" insinuated Jimmy, gently.

His friend dropped wearily into a chair.

"Yes, for two years," he said dully. "Jimmy, yellow and white won't mix; not even cream-yellow and white. Even love can't make them do it. I thought it could, even when I left China. I fully expected to go back. *She* knew, better than I did. She wouldn't believe I was coming back; I couldn't make her believe it. And I know now that she was right—I'm *not* going back. I'll never know another happy minute in my life, but I can't leave here, and I wouldn't bring her over here, even if I could, although I'd gladly die this minute if it would bring us together.

"I came back to America because I was getting homesick, and because I was disgusted with myself for being that way. I thought I was so saturated with China that if I came here once more it would cure me for life, and that I could go back and be happy and contented with her to the end of time. I believed it was working that way, at first. I felt like a cat in a strange garret, and I was fool enough to think I had turned Chinese. Jimmy, it can't be done. If I went back there now I'd go crazy inside of a week, much as I love her. I knew it when I first ran across you. The old life came back over me with a rush, and that first night you were here I suffered the tortures of the damned. Even the thought of her was spoiled, because it was part of China, I've fought against it: my heart is dead, here—dead! I want to go back; but I can't. I've given up, Jimmy. I'm not going."

THERE was a long silence. Pennington had slumped back in his chair, and sat with his eyes closed, his face drawn and old. Belden's heart ached for him, but he realized that silent sympathy was all he could offer; there was absolutely nothing a friend could say. It was for Pennington alone to decide—to choose which of his two conflicting wills was to ride above. No advice could help him. All of which had nothing to do with the fact that Belden pitied him from the bottom of his heart, and the silence grew painful as he waited for Pen to speak. When he did, he had controlled himself, with the Oriental fatalism he had so largely absorbed.

"It is simply that the Western mind is constructed differently from the Eastern, Jimmy," he said quietly, "different from the ground up. Each has followed its own line of development for centuries, untouched, or practically untouched, by the other. Not one white man in fifty who goes to China ever studies the Chinese as I did. But I only scratched the surface. With all my knowledge, I had to admit, even while I was there, that in some of the simplest things in life I couldn't understand even my own wife, close to each other though we were. She realized the difference, too. I was the first white man she ever saw, but she knew that my Chinese was only a veneer. Yet—here is one of the differences—she never gave the faintest sign of it until I spoke of coming here for a visit. Then she begged me not to come, and told me that if I did I'd never come back.

"I laughed at her, man-fashion. I told her that nothing could keep me away from her—that I was only taking a last farewell of America. She gave in, but she was never convinced; and time has proved that she was right. She knew I wasn't deserting her, for she never doubted me; but she knew how it would be. How did she know, Jimmy? A little hill girl—how did she know?"

"Search me!" said Jimmy helplessly.

"Yes, and search me!" said Pennington. "Well, she's well provided for; and it's the kindest thing I can do for her, now—to stay away. Better for both of us to lose the old life entirely, than go on with it, spoiled and desolated, and mocking us with its half-presence and memories."

He took a package from the table, and began turning it over and over in his slim, nervous hands.

"She gave me this when I left," he said, with a wistful smile. "She made me promise a dozen times that under no consideration would I open it until I decided not to come back. Not *unless*, mind you, but *until*. Well—I suppose I can open it, now."

He toyed with it nervously. Finally he began unwinding the oiled silk in which it was wrapped. Turn upon turn he removed, then a covering of straw matting, then more oiled silk, revealing at last a beautiful lacquered box, resembling a jewel casket. He opened it, and his face turned gray with pain.

"The yellow flowers," he murmured. "See, Jimmy! The yellow flowers."

Jimmy leaned forward, almost giddy from the heavy, cloying perfume that rose from the box. Inside were three gorgeous yellow blossoms, lying in a bed of purple silk. He touched one with the tip of his finger, and involuntarily shuddered. The petals were unnaturally stiff and waxy, and the picture came to his mind of that terrible temple whose gardens were the only place in which these flowers grew. He shrank back.

Pennington took the flowers from their silken bed and lifted them to his face.

"Poor little Girl of the Flowers!" he whispered. "Ah, if I could only go back! If I could only go back!"

He sat with the heavy-headed, voluptuous blossoms in his hands, staring at them with unseeing eyes. Over his head the cigarette and incense smoke swayed and shifted. Belden avoided the sight of it, obstinately. His nerves were fraying out. Finally he rose, unable to stand it any longer.

"I must be going, Pen," he said. "It's nearly morning, and I'm doing

you no good—I wish I could, God knows, but it's something beyond a friend."

"Yes, lad, go," said Pennington, with one of his infrequent smiles. "I'm better off alone, tonight; I'm sorry I gave you such an evening. I'll take a shower to clear my head, after a bit, and go to bed. Come again tomorrow, though, won't you? This will pass, and I'll be needing you for a few weeks."

He stood toying with the flowers as Belden struggled into his coat.

"I wish he'd quit fooling with those things," thought Jimmy, with a sudden feeling of irritation. Then, aloud, "Good-night, Arch."

"Good-night, Jimmy," said Pennington, laying his hand for a minute on Belden's shoulder as they shook hands. "You're a brick, old man!" And, as Jimmy turned slowly away, "I've often thought," musingly, "that we've sacrificed a good deal, perhaps, for our material progress here in the West. The Chinese have come down, almost unchanged, since 'way back at the beginning of things. Does it suggest anything to you, Jimmy? They know things, and *use forces*, that we forgot—centuries ago. But yellow and white won't mix."

Belden almost ran down the stairs.

ARRIVING home, he stepped into his bathroom to wash his hands. As he dipped them into the water he felt an intolerable burning in his shoulder, while the fingers of his right hand felt almost ready to burst.

"Ouch!" he exclaimed, jerking his hands out of the water. They were red and swollen, and on the right forefinger were tiny beads of blood.

"How the devil did I do that?" he wondered. "Ouch! Water makes it worse, that's sure! Lord, I've got the Willies from Pen's confounded heathen yarns! . . . Poor old Pen: he's hard hit."

Putting some ointment on his sore hand, he bound it up and began to prepare for bed, cursing the clumsy bandages as he struggled with his collar.

"Uh!" he exclaimed, as his telephone rang suddenly. "Man, but I'm jumpy! Who the devil is calling at this time of night . . . Belden speaking," he called into the instrument.

"Jimmy!" came a horrible, rasping travesty on Pennington's voice, over the wire. "—God's sake—doctor—here quick—"

There was a clatter, as if the receiver at the other end had been dropped.

"Hello, Pen!" he shouted. "Hello!"

There was no answer. He listened tensely for a moment, then dashed from the room. On the sidewalk he met his neighbor, Dr. Fairchild, just leaving a taxicab.

"Back in!" he cried, hurling the astonished doctor into the cab and flinging himself in after. "37 Court Place, and drive like hell!" he called to the driver. "And pick up a cop at the Sixth Street station."

IT couldn't have been done quicker. Barely six minutes had elapsed since the ringing of Belden's telephone, when the big policeman crashed through Pennington's door.

There was a light in the bathroom, and the shower was running, but Pennington was not there. They found him on the floor by the telephone, when Jimmy switched on the lights. He was naked, as though he had run to the telephone from the shower; and he was lying in an incredibly wide pool of blood, quite dead.

"Well, I'll be—!" gasped Dr. Fairchild, wiping cold sweat from his forehead as he straightened up from a quick examination. "Maybe the coroner can find a name for this, but I can't! Not a scratch or a bruise on him, but he has bled from every pore in his body! He's bled dry—bone dry!"

On the wall was a scrawled attempt at writing—in blood: *"She cam—gether al—ight appy now."*

Jimmy turned away, sick and choking. "I hope so! I hope so! Maybe yellow and white don't count, where he is now."

On the table lay the three yellow flowers, *as withered as though they had lain there for years.*

AS he stumbled weakly down the stairs in the dismal gray of the city's early dawn, Pennington's last words came back to him:

"The Chinese have come down, almost unchanged, since 'way back at the beginning of things. . . They know things, and use forces, that we forgot—centuries ago. But yellow and white won't mix."

"No, yellow and white won't mix—not on this earth," he thought. "But, God! How they can collide!"

THE VISIT OF THE SKULLS

By LEONARD FOHN

The leering skulls float round my bed,
Like lonesome yellow moons,
And tell their tales of lives long sped,
In melancholy tunes.

Each with its woes and foregone dreams
Displays its life to me,
Like some weary wandering streams,
That never reach the sea.

But one hangs back and looks away
As soft as scented glove.
"Tell me," I cried, "your life I pray."
"I lived and died of love."

The Second Installment of
SYBLA RAMUS' Weird Novel
of Mysterious India

Coils of Darkness

CHAPTER SIX

A RIDDLE OF PERSONALITY

WHEN Halketh saw the snake, a small cobra, sting Mildred on the lip, he stood transfixed with horror. A cry of agony choked in his throat. He fully believed that she was doomed, and that in a few minutes she would die before his eyes. He waited, without hope, for the end.

As Mildred felt the cobra's touch, a sudden change came over her. At first she stood still, tense, alert. Then the fury passed from her face. It softened, the pallor of her cheeks changed into a rosy flush, and she again became, apparently, normal. Her body swayed slightly for an instant, then relaxed into her lover's arms. Her head sank on his shoulder with a happy smile.

Halketh was so benumbed by surprise that he vaguely wondered if he were dreaming. Meanwhile, the Indian had approached. Deftly he seized the snake and consigned it to the basket.

Mildred opened her eyes, then raised her head with her own sweet smile upon a face now radiant with well-being. She threw her arms about Halketh's neck and kissed him passionately. Even in that moment, so intense with conflicting emotions, he noted that her lip appeared in no way swollen or affected by the sting of the cobra.

Unable to grasp more than that her apparent return to life must be only a temporary respite from the fatal result which he felt must still come, Halketh continued to hold her closely.

"Am I dreaming, or is this a miracle?" he gasped. Then he seized the Indian's robe desperately in his agonized fear, pouring forth commands and entreaties for such antidotes as the man might possess. But Mildred stopped him with kisses.

"I am perfectly well, Ernest. You must not worry! It was nothing—nothing! I never felt better in my life!"

Halketh, still bewildered and sick from the fear of death for his beloved, could not yet be reassured by Mildred's words. Instead, they only added to the dread which turned him cold.

The Indian had watched the scene, and now took from his robe a small case containing an ointment. Halketh caught the gleam of a strange smile upon the inscrutable face as the Hindu offered him the open case and instructed him to apply a small portion to the marks left by the snake's sting.

"Have no fear, Sahib," he continued in good English. "There are those to whom the kiss of the serpent gives no harm, but only brings delight. The Mem Sahib may safely enjoy her pleasure."

But Halketh was far from feeling safe about Mildred as yet. He caught at the idea suggested by the man's words and questioned him eagerly, although the chill of horror deepened even as the words of hope came.

"Then you mean that some persons cannot be affected by snake poison?" he asked.

The Indian smiled again.

"They may be affected, but not as others are, Sahib."

Mildred, now standing at her lover's side, pulled him down so that she might whisper in his ear:

"Ernest, dear!—do buy me those snakes—I want them, dear!"

He started backward, and all the while the Indian's shadowy smile remained.

"My darling! What is it that you ask?"

"Sweetheart! You love me too well to deny me a wish, surely—I would deny *you* nothing, dearest!" She spoke with a caressing, soft voice, and smiled deep into his eyes.

Strong distaste came over Halketh.

"But, dear, this is horrible! You cannot mean that you would want those disgusting reptiles?"

She took one of his hands in both of hers.

"Yes, dearest, I do want them *so* much, you can't think—only to have, you know—" She paused, looking wistfully up into his eyes, then went on: "Darling Ernest! Every one in India does snake charming—yes dear, really! —to please *me*—" Then to the Indian:

"You would sell them to me, would you not?"

The man considered before answering.

"Forgive me, Mem Sahib, these I could not sell."

"But you could bring me others. I live at the Garrison. You could bring some to me there—"

"Mildred, I really cannot have this!" interposed Halketh.

She pressed her fingers to his lips, her own rosebud ones pouting sweetly at him.

"Ernest, dearest, you surely could—to please me—"

He felt cold and sick at the idea. But she was adorable. No man could resist her—certainly not himself. He turned sharply to the Indian, who had packed all his snakes in the basket meantime, seemingly about to go on his way.

"Bring the lady what she wishes!"

The man lifted his head and looked in his eyes—a strange look which he remembered in after years.

"I will come, Sahib, if you wish it." He saluted gravely, raised his basket, and disappeared among the trees.

In silence Halketh stood, while Mildred leaned upon him in joyous abandon. Suddenly he seized her by the shoulders, holding her from him at arms' length as he gazed deep into her eyes.

"My Mildred! My own little girl!" His voice had a tone of pleading in it "Tell me what it means? What has come to you, darling, that you wish to have those horrible snakes—can even handle them, caress—My God! It is frightful!"

The last words burst from him in a kind of crescendo of agitation, as the various repulsive pictures forced themselves into his mind again, one after another. Other things, too, lingered in his memory. Mildred's pretty laughter struck jarringly upon him. Too many strange things were showing themselves —had shown themselves at other times. He was in no mood to be lightly satisfied with playful explanations.

"Do not laugh, Mildred!" He drew her closer. "Look at it seriously, darling. You must see what a horrible, abnormal desire this is."

She laughed again, and Halketh's overstrained endurance gave way. He shook her violently, then convulsively caught her to his breast.

"Mildred! Mildred! Let me help you, darling—tell me how to drive away

this strange spell. There is something wrong—"

He gazed at the little wound, still quite uninflamed.

"Don't you realize it, my own love! Don't you see how hideous, how uncanny it all is? It alarms me—terrifies me!"

"Don't be cross," she said poutingly, like a child who will not be scolded.

"Cross! If you knew how it troubles me, for *your* sake. It affects me—I can't tell you how dreadfully. You have no idea how it changes you—my own dear little girl!"

His impassioned words, his extreme agitation—these penetrated Mildred's consciousness, apparently. Her face changed, and she set herself seriously to reassure him, to quiet his fears.

"Dearest Ernest, you exaggerate—you are alarmed because you are not yet used to Indian ways—"

"Do you mean to say," he broke in sharply, "it is common here for girls to go mad at sight of a snake—to fondle them, let them bite—to—to—my God! Mildred, either I am insane, or you are!" He really could not go on, so greatly had the incident shocked him, and Mildred saw that he was deeply affected.

"Sweetheart," she said tenderly, "it isn't so serious as that. In India, people are so accustomed to snakes and snake charmers that we do not feel about them as you do. And it is so wonderfully interesting to try one's hand at charming them—much more so than taming other pets. That is why I want these, darling. I shall enjoy it so much."

Halketh was already yielding to her charm, as he knew he would in the end. But he started anew at the unpleasant reminder of the impending coming of the snakes.

"Now, Mildred, you cannot be serious—you surely do not mean to buy them, if the old devil comes?"

"Of course, I do, darling. You will soon be quite interested yourself, when you see how cleverly I shall train them . . . "And so forth, until Halketh was lulled into a kind of uneasy acquiescence.

Mildred was her most adorable self during the homeward ride. She was more irresistible than ever, with love showing itself in every look and gesture. Her brilliancy of mind had been, since her recovery, a peculiarly potent charm to her lover. Today she was unusually inspired.

Halketh, after a few spiritless attempts at remonstrance, gave himself up to her fascination. Let her do what she would—snakes or no snakes. He was far too happy in the present moment for the pursuit of troubling thoughts. So he put it all behind him; pushed the whole matter to the back of his mind, and left it there. Although the vague, disquieting shadow continued to hover about him for several days.

The Indian came in Halketh's absence, as it chanced, so that the purchase of the snakes was concluded by Mildred, untroubled by onlookers. She failed to mention the incident, in the rush of other events, so that the snakes had been installed in their new quarters for some time, before any of the family became aware of their presence.

Halketh, for his part, was thankful to hear no more of the abhorred topic. He made himself hope that the whim had been forgotten, and was only too anxious that it never be recalled.

Lady Rathbone was greatly shocked one morning, when, having entered her daughter's room unexpectedly, she found her absorbed in the contemplation of a medium sized snake, which was coiled around her bare arm.

Her mother's screams roused Mildred from her preoccupation. Quickly removing the snake from her arm, she turned smilingly.

"See, Mama! I've quite learned to charm them. It's very simple."

Her mother was horrified.

"Mildred! What do you mean? How did you get those creatures? They must be killed at once!"

She clutched at the bell rope to summon the servants, but Mildred deftly caught the outstretched hand as it neared the cord.

"Oh, no, Mama darling! These are quite harmless—to me—and I like to teach them tricks. Ernest knows. It's just for fun, you know, Mummy dear."

She thrust the snakes into a kind of basket which stood near.

"I think it's perfectly horrible! Oh, what a fright it gave me, child!"

Lady Rathbone sank into a chair, while Mildred devoted herself to calming her mother's fears and soothing her violent repugnance, until at length she gave an unwilling consent to the snakes being retained.

"But this is nothing to the purpose, my dear child." She waved away the unpleasant topic of the reptiles, dismissing it from her mind in view of the weighty matters she desired to confer upon with her daughter.

"What I want to talk to you about is that your father has just received—now listen, Mildred! and don't be inattentive," for Mildred's gaze had left her mother's face and was wandering searchingly about the room.

"It's very important, dear. Your father has been ordered home! Now what do you say to that?"

Lady Rathbone paused and took breath before proceeding. Mildred looked startled and frightened. She opened her mouth as if to speak, when her mother continued:

"And that's not all. Ernest insists—and your father agrees with him—that the wedding take place at once. We—"

"Then I can remain in India?"

"Certainly—as long as Ernest remains. We must change many of our plans, you see, but the wedding shall not be any the less brilliant for all that. Only we shall have mountains to get through with, to carry it out as I planned originally."

And so into a vortex of excitement the entire Post was plunged, as preparations for the most brilliant wedding in that part of India for many a long day were rushed forward at a lightning speed.

Naturally, so small a matter as household pets, be they what they might, would be forgotten in the whirl of confusion which caught up all concerned or unconcerned.

Never was wedding more brilliant. Never bride more fair. Triumphantly Lady Rathbone kissed the happy pair as they left for the honeymoon. The proud mother remarked later to the Colonel, as they prepared to enjoy a well-earned slumber:

"My dear, I don't think our time in India has been ill-spent!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

LOVE'S REALIZATION

HAPPINESS proved no detriment to the progress of Lord Halketh's chosen work. Neither did his ambition grow less as time went on. India had not disappointed him. He had found the opportunities on that soil he believed unattainable elsewhere for the development of his theories.

Returning from their honeymoon, glowing with the inspiration that perfect joy had kindled, Halketh threw himself into his work as never before. In recognition of the high scientific and literary achievements he had already reached, combined with powerful family influence at his disposal, he had found it easy to secure such facilities as he desired to further the ends he hoped to gain.

The Home Office had been most obliging. After due consideration he had received the command he thought most

favorable for his plans. He believed that much of the constant trouble of uprisings throughout India were caused by the methods used by those in command, who, too often, failed to come in touch with the beings under their rule; thus remaining ignorant of the natures and characteristics of a race difficult at best to be comprehended by their alien rulers. To Halketh, with his deeply analytical mind, this became daily a more engrossing study. He immersed himself in it. He studied Bengali so energetically that it was not long before he could exchange ideas with the natives with some fluency. He learned their customs, too, with remarkable rapidity, mingling with the people easily and tactfully; never disturbing their ideals, yet trying gradually to lead them towards modern ideas.

Even in the prosecution of his work, however, there was one study which still held a higher place in his life. His wife—she was the one object to which his life aim stood second.

Their marriage was ideal. Mildred was wife, sweetheart, companion—all that woman could be to man. She was the inspiration of her husband's efforts to a great extent, for her developing mentality made her amply capable of following him in all his interests. She was a never-ending joy and wonder to him, not only in her beauty and brilliant mind, but in the glowing love she radiated for him—when certain phases of her strange character were uppermost.

Not that Mildred ever varied in sweetness, for sweet she always was. She was always affectionate, too, but Halketh soon learned that her affection had its variations. Never sharply or unpleasantly, but there seemed to be a kind of variability in the quality of her feelings. He studied his wife unceasingly, but he could not locate nor decide anything about this strange and regular pulsation of her moods. He only knew that at times her whole being glowed with radiance, life, joy, love; at others she was preoccupied and withdrawn.

"Ernest! My soul, my lover, my husband!" she exclaimed one day as she came into his arms.

He bent his head, his lips pressed hers.

"Mildred, are you satisfied with your life with me—are you content to stay here in India, helping me, inspiring me in my work?"

"Content!—in India, with you! Ah, my dearest, there is no place I love so well! My India! My husband! The two are one love—for here we found each other!"

He kissed her again.

"My sweetheart! Do you know that I will not spare one atom of your heart to anything else, even country. I want it all—*all*, darling!" And he looked into the dreamy eyes, long and searchingly, as if to draw forth the mystic soul which lived behind them, and to fathom every depth therein.

For now and then a vague uneasiness assailed the husband; a feeling that there still existed something in his wife's inmost being which always hovered just beyond his reach. But Mildred flashed a smile—a smile which lit up her eyes with that fire which always burned there, when the radiant phase—the phase he loved—was uppermost.

As Halketh studied his wife's varying phases, he could never sense a definite change of feeling or complete cessation. It was more like a night of rest following a brilliant day of waking life. These periods never failed to succeed each other, although the duration of each might vary. Sometimes the brilliant phase might last for weeks—or be broken in upon for a few hours of eclipse. At other times the period might occupy days, during which Mildred appeared to sink deeper and deeper into an apathy. Even her love for her husband seemed quiescent, dormant, although the sweetness of her nature never entirely disappeared. Halketh sought anxiously for the underlying causes.

"My darling," he said one day, "what is this lassitude, this loss of interest in things, which comes over you at times?"

Mildred looked up at him dreamily. She did not move nor speak. It was one of those lovely days when all Nature seems to be in perfect harmony. No false vibration of sound or color disturbed the sweetness of unity in which the Universe, for the time being, seemed to have sunk.

Halketh sat down beside his wife. He took her hand and held it in a silent clasp, hoping she would speak, or show some sign of animation.

"Mildred!" The one word, in his anxious tone, roused a fleeting attention. She turned a quiet, unconcerned look on him.

"You want me, Ernest? Or shall we not stay here to rest—before I—" She broke off, absently, and it almost seemed that her eyes might close in sleep. Halketh drew her head to his shoulder.

"Before what, dearest? What do you plan?"

Mildred did not move. After several moments she said slowly:

"Plan? I would not plan—I wait until the moment—" Again she stopped, dreamily gazing before her, out over the hills.

"What moment, dear?—what are you dreaming of, my Mildred? Tell me?"

But all Halketh's coaxing could gain nothing more than vague, fantastic answers. He could make nothing out of it. There was no other way, apparently, than to let these phases, these periods of eclipse, pass as they would. There seemed no physical affection of any kind, for her health was perfect. It appeared to be an infallibly arriving state or mood, although without regularity as to time. But for this latter fact it might have been the correspondent to those periods of sleeping and waking found throughout all nature.

At last Halketh became habituated to it. He grew to conclude that it was simply a peculiarity of Mildred's own individuality, remarkable as this was in every way. As such, it was to be accepted as he accepted all the rest of her. Mildred was Mildred, and he was the happy being to whom the Gods had given her. In confirmation of this conclusion regarding her peculiarity, Halketh chanced one day to read an account of a famous composer who was known to have produced his glorious works in avalanches for days together, in furious outpourings of his genius; then perhaps for equal periods of time he would sink into a lethargy whence nothing could rouse him until the next awakening of his inspiration.

This tallied so exactly with Mildred's case that her husband believed he had found the explanation, for during her brilliant phases, when both beauty and animation seemed to blaze into actual glory, her intellect became illuminated, and not only her husband, but many a man of note in the scientific and literary world, meeting the lovely Lady Halketh at such times, marvelled at her powerful grasp and keen penetration of even the most abstruse problems. She supported these natural gifts by an excellent equipment of technical knowledge, too, for she gloried in absorbing learning of all kinds when in her inspirational periods with incredible ease and retentive power.

Thus Lady Halketh was fast becoming famous in English society in India. She was more talked of than any woman of her set, and as Halketh gradually became tranquillized by observing that her condition showed no signs of change for the worse, also that the great mental development continued steadily, he came to the definite conclusion that his wife was a similar type of genius to that of the famous composer whose career had so greatly helped him to an understanding of Mildred's peculiar make-up. Soothed by this plausible explanation, Halketh came to accept her moods as

something to be expected, coming and going as they would.

CHAPTER EIGHT

LIEUTENANT RONALD

WITHOUT doubt, there was a difference in Mildred's changing phases. Gradually the apathetic periods had extended themselves, and, when she emerged from them, the returns were less vivid than before. As Halketh roused to keener observation, he became positive that this was the case. He missed the glorious outburst of vitality always in evidence after an eclipse. There was a restlessness in all she did. Nothing could content her. She seemed always to be reaching out for something intangible, unattainable.

Halketh thought again and again of the terrible result of the night raid upon her father's garrison, in which she had been snatched up by the natives as they swept by in flight. Could it be that her recovery had not been as perfect as they had thought—that some ineradicable effect was to remain forever upon her sensitive nervous system?

He anxiously considered this as he watched his wife quietly but closely. Long age he had sensed a certain difficulty of approach in trying to discuss with Mildred her chameleon-like emotional side. He felt that the subject was an unwelcome one to her, and therefore he had never pressed it. Likewise, he now made no comment, although he began to feel that if the listless condition continued much longer he would take steps to obtain expert medical advice.

Just then a situation arose making it necessary for him to undertake an inspection tour in the outlying districts of his command. The news came in unexpectedly, and Halketh hurried to his quarters to tell his wife. It was the first time since their marriage that he had been called away for more than a day or two, and it was with great reluctance that he looked forward to an absence now of at least ten days.

Mildred was sitting listlessly on the veranda. She scarcely raised her eyes at her husband's approach.

"Dear," he said, "it is absolutely necessary for me to inspect the district, as there is trouble about the taxes which I must look into. I dread to leave you."

Mildred looked up with a quick, vivid glance.

"You must go away, Ernest?" she said rapidly. "When?"

This was more interest than she had shown in anything for some time, and Halketh thought the idea of their parting had startled her.

"That is just the difficulty, dear. I should go on as soon as I possibly can, for the situation is growing worse every day. And I must be away ten days at least. I wish I could see you a little more like yourself before I leave you."

He raised her face to kiss her, and she returned the kiss, more in her old way, as she said:

"You must not think of me, dear. I am really feeling better, and I promise you I shall be quite fit again by the time you come back."

Halketh felt the thrill of hope once more. Perhaps the old revival was about to bloom forth, and Mildred would be again his radiant dream-love. How hard to miss that glory because of tiresome affairs about taxes!

"Mildred! You are mine again! Tell me—in these late days of quiet did you dream of me?"

She smiled vaguely, without answering. He held her close.

"Do you know how hard it is to leave you, sweetheart?"

Mildred looked into his eyes, languidly, dreamily still.

"Dearest, I would not be a hindrance to your duty. I want to be a help, instead. You know I am well cared for here, and shall be safe until you are home again. See—here is Lieutenant Ronald wanting to speak to you."

He turned. "Ah, Ronald—come up, take a seat. I sent for you because I must leave the Post at once for a ten days' trip. Those troublesome fellows up in the hills object to taxation, and we may have them about our ears presently, unless we can settle them in some way right now. I shall pay them a visit all around, and talk it over with them. You will be in charge here, as Rutherford is away. I'll run over a few details with you, while they are getting our kits packed."

Mildred was still at her husband's side. She and the handsome young officer conversed while Halketh rapidly jotted down a few of the most important memoranda for Ronald's use.

There was more animation in Mildred's manner than Halketh had seen for some time past, and his heart swelled at the thought of the devotion which roused her to this effort to send him forth cheerily. When, later, the horses were brought round, he held his wife in a silent embrace as he kissed her good-bye.

TRUE to her words, she had entirely recovered her normal tone when Halketh returned. More blooming than ever, she rode out some miles along the road to meet him.

Ronald escorted his commanding officer's wife. Never had Halketh thought her more beautiful than when she dashed up to his side and held up her radiant face for his kiss. In the happy shock of meeting, he was conscious only of the joy of seeing her—of having her beside him. This past, however, a sudden, indefinable shadow fell upon his heart. It was as if the Sun had slipped behind a cloud, leaving a little chill in its place. Vaguely conscious of the sensation, he could not analyze it.

Just then his eye fell on Ronald's face, to surprise there an expression of such worship that a great shock ran through him. How dared Ronald, or any other man, look at his wife like that! He glanced quickly to Mildred's face. At that instant she was turning toward her husband with a smile of love. But she had been turning from Ronald! Had the smile been for himself—or for the other—which? Mildred saw his wild look.

"Ernest! Dearest! What is it? Are you ill?"

She was so startled and solicitous that it brought him to his senses, and with a keen pang of shame. What ailed him? he asked himself. He must be insane, vile, that such a thought could enter his mind!

Remorse overcame Halketh. He would not have had her dream him capable of such smallness. So when she answered his comments on her blooming health with the information that she had gone riding very often in his absence, and it had helped her so much, he would not allow himself the question as to who had been her escort.

"I'll take you myself, darling—every day!" he said eagerly. "I see it has done you a world of good already."

But after two or three rides, there never could be found a time convenient, it seemed. Also, Halketh's duties became more pressing at this juncture, and somehow Mildred found great difficulty in planning her time to suit his. Nevertheless, he saw with thankfulness that her spirits remained buoyant. He believed also that her periods of listlessness grew less frequent and less marked. The only drawback now to an almost entirely happy situation was that he had frequently to be away for two or three days at a time, owing to unrest among the natives.

If Lieutenant Ronald called often at their quarters, it was usually because of matters necessary for the attention of the commanding officer. If Halketh was out, as he generally happened to

be at the particular times chosen for such calls, Ronald not improperly waited for the Major's return. Not for worlds would Halketh have allowed himself to remark that on such occasions he invariably found his wife and the handsome officer gaily chatting.

One day Halketh returned from an expedition earlier than he had expected. Entering his quarters and seeing the drawing-room deserted, he ran lightly upstairs in search of his wife. She was in her own room, just changing from her riding clothes to a cool gown of filmy lace.

He could not repress his surprise, for it had been a long time since she had ridden, declaring herself tired of it.

"Why are you home so soon, Ernest? I did not expect you before tonight!" She ran to him with a most affectionate greeting.

Once again the shadow fell. He could not crush down the impression that she wished to caress him away from further inquiry—or rather, that his sudden coming had startled her, for some reason that she did not wish him to suspect. He could not keep back the question:

"Who was with you?"

"I was alone, dear," she answered quickly, as she drew his face down for another kiss.

But in that moment he saw Lieutenant Ronald crossing the parade ground. The young man wore riding breeches!

CHAPTER NINE

JEALOUSY AND TORMENT

A GROAN burst from Halketh's lips. He pushed his wife back from him and held her at arm's length, gazing into her eyes as if he would never tear his own away. She was frightened.

"Dearest Ernest! You are ill—I know you are! Let me help you, love—come here by the window—lie down and rest, in the fresh air!"

She spoke with such apparently real feeling, and such evident alarm for him, that once again his conscience smote him. He released her, and sank back wearily on the divan near which they were standing.

"No, dear—I am not ill—only—I do not understand—"

He pulled himself together as Mildred, in great distress, threw herself upon his shoulder, imploring him to let her call the surgeon.

"Just to look at you, dear—only let him see if there is no trouble. It might be the heat, and such a long ride. I should feel so much easier, Ernest dear."

"No; I am well enough. Something upset me a bit—something I saw today disturbed me."

And he comforted her, while an idea formed in his mind which he actually blushed for. But he would see Ronald. He would learn the object of his ride, without allowing him to suspect—

Accordingly, meeting Ronald a little later, Halketh cleverly enough brought their talk to the matter he could not banish from his thought, so that Ronald naturally mentioned that he had ridden about the whole afternoon, having had various duties calling him all over the place, as he put it.

Hearing the Lieutenant's account, Halketh had scarcely any grounds left for believing that Ronald could have been in his wife's company that afternoon. But, try as he would, he could not shake off a feeling that something sinister was impending.

Halketh found himself watching his wife and Harry Ronald whenever he saw them together. Plainly enough, Halketh could read the love in Ronald's eyes, as often as their gaze turned on Mildred. But this was all; nothing in the manner of either to which the most jealous husband could take exception.

Mildred was herself again, her real self; fond, devoted, and with all her old-time warmth of love. At times an unpleasant memory raised its head, but Halketh pushed it away at once, deciding to enjoy the happiness he held in his hand, without questioning further regarding what had most probably been merely his own disturbed fancy.

Halketh had his own remarkable successes in his particular field for an additional gratification. He was fast becoming a prominent figure both in British and native circles. So popular was he among the Hindoos that on several occasions he had averted serious trouble by his personal influence alone. He was growing to be recognized—although sub rosa—as confidential diplomatic representative of the British Government. Already he had been despatched by private instructions from Downing Street to deal with native situations threatening serious consequences. Each time Halketh's remarkable personal magnetism, tact and delicate sense of honor had succeeded in bringing about amicable arrangements in place of the trouble feared. These brilliant results placed him high in favor, and whispers were running that a far higher command than his present one might shortly be offered him.

Confirmation of the latter rumors was not long in coming. Halketh received advices announcing a near visit from a very high official. Shortly afterward that official, with his suite, arrived at the Post, and it was no surprise to Halketh that the mission was of great importance. Others believed Lord Lesquith's visit to be the forerunner of a new dignity awaiting Halketh.

Major and Lady Halketh, as official host and hostess, were busy caring for their guests. Mildred, always a brilliant hostess, soon had the notable himself, as well as his entire suite, at her feet.

"My dear Lady Halketh," he said, "I cannot think what England is about, allowing India to absorb your time to the exclusion of us at home. It is not fair. I really think I must have your husband ordered home, for we cannot spare his charming wife—eh, Halketh?"

Lord Lesquith turned to Halketh, who laughed.

"I have all I can do to keep her for myself, as it is. But that is the penalty, I suppose, for having won her."

"I don't think we are going to let you be so selfish in the future, my dear fellow."

He paused a moment to take an ice from the tray offered by one of the white-clad Indian servants.

"We can't go on wasting such sweetness on the desert air. England should keep her most brilliant ornaments for herself. I've an idea!"

His Lordship smiled mysteriously at Halketh, then addressed himself to Mildred, who was the center of a fascinated group at the moment, and had not heard the conversation between her husband and his guest.

"What do you say, Lady Halketh, to being kidnapped and carried back to England? I wouldn't say it might not happen any day. How would you like it?"

Lord Lesquith spoke lightly, but with the suggestion of a serious undercurrent in his words. Halketh turned to his wife with a smile—to be startled by the expression on her face, a look almost of fear.

"Oh, I could not go to England!" she exclaimed as if involuntarily. "I could not leave India!"

Lord Lesquith looked at her in surprise, even more at her manner of speaking than at her words. Ronald was standing a little behind Mildred. At Lesquith's words he had drawn nearer to her. Halketh noticed it, and thought he saw his wife's eyes seek Ronald's face with a look of terrible intensity, although the expression lasted but an instant.

Then something seemed to give way in his heart. A sudden flash seemed to illuminate his brain, lighting up its darkest corners where had been slumbering those vague, tormenting fears of

some time ago. Fears which had been lulled into abeyance in the pleasant slipping by of days warmed by the sunny happiness of the security Mildred's reestablished health had brought with it.

But now, in this lightning flash, Halketh knew that those fears had never been wiped away from his consciousness. They had only been put to sleep temporarily. He was positive of this now; positive in spite of all the reassurances of the last few months. Reassurances on which he had fed as the drug addict feeds on his poison, and by means of which he had slept away the time in happy dreams—dreams mistaken for realities! Up they leaped—those shadowy forms now suddenly become real and menacing—to be faced at last for what they were! He knew also now that an underlying conviction had always existed, deep down in his subconscious self, that there was a part of his wife's being so far from his reach that it might have been in another world, in another life, impossible for him to penetrate.

He tried to hold on to himself, to force himself back to faith, as he had done in the past, once before. After all, what had he to go upon? Merely a look, a careless speech of Mildred's, a chance movement of Ronald's. He fought himself thus, while vaguely conscious of her gay replies and bright conversational leads as she found herself again after her momentary lapse. Surely nothing could be other than it seemed!

But it was useless. Try as he would, he could not throw out the suspicion that throbbed incessantly, insisting on going over and over the round of shadowy facts or fancies. Suffocating, he tore at his collar—then, suddenly, turned quite cold and clear in his mind. There was the necessity for caution. Caution!—or all might escape him! He would move slowly, employ craft, until he held the certainty in his hands. *Then* he could act! But now—

He rose quietly, excused himself casually to his guest, then passed out of the room, not returning until he felt again sufficiently master of himself to see the evening through.

CHAPTER TEN

A CHALLENGE

AT last the house was silent. Every guest had vanished down the foliage framed pathway, exquisite in the moonlight which brought out every leaf in misty, lace-like shimmering pattern against the sky. The last to leave was Ronald, and Mildred stood a moment at the open door after he had gone, looking out upon the beauty of the tropic night.

Then she turned, moved lightly to her husband's side and leaned her head against his shoulder silently. He stood still and rigid. Mildred started as she felt the strangeness and tenseness of his manner.

"You are tired, dear?"

She felt suddenly at a loss for words after beginning to speak. For some reason the caress she had been about to give she withheld, and she stood as she was, waiting. But he remained silent and motionless, not even turning his eyes upon her. Uneasily she waited a moment or two, then raised her hand to his shoulder.

"Dearest, you are so quiet. Was the evening too long, and bored you, perhaps?"

Again he did not answer. She turned and looked up into his face, anxiously, inquiringly.

"Ernest! What is it? Is anything wrong, love?"

She shook him lightly, scarcely realizing the action.

At last he moved. He looked at her with a look she could not fathom. She thought that he made several attempts to speak, but could not utter the words. She was thoroughly alarmed now.

He spoke, and Mildred started and for an instant almost looked around for the stranger she thought must be addressing them.

"Mildred," the hollow voice said, "you are tired. I see you need rest—" He stopped, and it almost seemed as if he were trying to take breath. But the commonplace words somewhat reassured her in spite of his strange air.

"Ernest, dear, it is *you* who need rest. You must not hide anything from me. I am worried about you. Tell me the truth. Are you ill or in pain?"

He roused himself.

"Certainly not! Why should you think me sick or suffering? Come, dear! I insist on your going in, and to bed. The evening was long—perhaps too long, in some ways."

He made a great effort to seem natural, to be quite at ease, as usual. But Mildred knew that something was wrong.

"Then you must come, too, Ernest," she said after a pause. "I'm afraid you are worn out, with the long evening and so much talking. Come, dear. Let us both go in."

She looked up into his face pleadingly, and he turned slowly, looking down into her eyes. He stood long thus, she returning the look with fond and anxious question in her eyes. At last he moved. He passed his hand over her hair, then touched it lightly with his lips. A strange look was on his face, but Mildred's head was bent and she did not see it.

"There—you must go, Mildred, because I ask it. Let me find you asleep when I come up. I must look at some papers first for the morning mail."

This time he succeeded in being more like himself, and Mildred left him and went to her room. She continued to be uneasy about him, but she was very tired, and soon fell into a deep sleep.

She did not waken until well into the next morning, to find a note from her husband telling her that an emergency had obliged him to leave early for an outlying point. He feared he might not be able to return before the second night following. His excuses to their visitors, etc., etc.

Mildred did not like it. How strange of him! she thought. Why had he gone without waking her? And he was so unlike himself the night before! Could anything serious have happened that he did not want her to know?

During the morning she asked Ronald about it, but he professed to know nothing of any news of special interest or importance. Mildred was a soldier's daughter and a soldier's wife, and knew enough not to press her inquiry on such a matter. She concluded that her husband had received news he preferred to keep to himself, and therefore she said nothing of what his note had told her.

Yet a certain uneasiness hung over her all day. As she thought about it, his manner the night before struck her as most unusual, whatever its cause. Strangest of all that he should contemplate remaining away the following day, for that was the date fixed for the departure of the visitors, and a special entertainment had been arranged in their honor. Serious indeed must be the emergency he would allow to prevent his taking leave personally of official guests whose rank entitled them to every courtesy. It would be a grave breach of etiquette if Major Halketh were absent except for some extreme emergency.

Mildred found it difficult through the day to account for him satisfactorily in answer to the many questions asked her. At last, tired and nervous, she fled from observation. The afternoon was wearing late, and she decided on a solitary walk, such as she often took now.

Her husband, it seemed, must at least have suspected this custom, for he was hidden in the shadows of a certain leafy grove, from which no move from his quarters could escape him. He had been

waiting there, without food or water, all that long day. For what? He felt—knew—that sooner or later she would come. He would wait for her—he would wait! . . .

The day passed on. Long shadows began to fall. Would she never come! Would the revelation never begin! He must be sure—to do his work! Then sink in everlasting oblivion.

At last the side door, seldom used, opened. She came out—quietly—cautiously. She did not wish to meet passersby—that was plain! Except *one!* There was *one* she would meet! But she took the opposite path—the road to the jungle! Why? What would take her there?

And he—the lover she was going to meet—where was *he?* No horse today—then she would not go far. He must hurry if he hoped to make a detour in time to catch her—before she reached the branching paths—the foliage soon grew too thick and one could easily lose one's quarry. But in his haste he stumbled and fell heavily, striking his head on a stone . . . .

How much time had he lost, he wondered? Could he have lain stunned long? Cursed luck! He must push on. His head did not seem very clear. Would the loss of time make a great difference? But in any case he must hurry on.

Where was the path? How was it he seemed to be far away from the path? Ah! Now he struck into it! Yes, this was the road, but where was she? She must have reached the thicket where the paths branched! What if he should lose her, after all? . . .

Who was that coming from the Post? The lover, of course! Now the picture was almost complete! Let him deal with that one first! Then—later—Mildred's turn!

"Ronald! Where are you going?"

Taken by surprise, the young officer started—guiltily, Halketh thought, as he mechanically returned his junior's salute.

"I was taking a bit of a walk, sir," Ronald answered in some confusion at the extraordinary manner of his commanding officer and the wild expression on his face.

Halketh strode up to him.

"No walk, sir! You are going to meet—" the words seemed to stick in his throat. How could he name her in connection with such a thought, even now! Ronald stared at him, his face growing stern. Halketh swallowed, as if trying to complete his sentence. At last he finished lamely: "to—to—meet—someone."

"No, sir! I am *not* going to meet *someone!*" Ronald replied sharply. Halketh lost his self-control.

"Don't quibble!—don't lie to me!" he shouted.

Ronald stepped up to him.

"Lie? You dare to use that word to me, sir?"

"Liar!—and worse! That is what I call you!" Halketh was almost suffocating, as he flung the words hoarsely.

Ronald controlled himself. "What do you accuse me of?" he said quietly. "Have you gone mad?"

"So you pretend you do not understand me? I know your errand here! I do not wish to name it! Will you fight?"

"Certainly, sir!" Ronald mastered himself with difficulty. "I will ask Lieutenant Harrington to act for me." He saluted stiffly, and walked back in the direction of the Post.

Halketh remained where Ronald had left him. He felt dazed and wished he could sleep. He lay down on the thick grass, in the shade of some dense bushes, and fell almost instantly into a deep, dreamless sleep.

When he awakened, the moon was shining brightly. He had no idea of the time, but only knew he must get to the Post without being seen by anyone. He intended to ask his closest friend, Captain Rutherford, to arrange matters for him. Somehow he found himself at Rutherford's quarters, without remembering how he got there. He knocked, pushed the door open, and stumbled in blindly. Rutherford stared in amazement at the wild face he did not at first recognize.

"Let me in, Rutherford. Hide me—don't let anyone know I'm here." Halketh fell into the nearest seat, and sat staring blankly before him for a time.

Rutherford, after a dazed moment, hurriedly poured out a glass of whisky. But Halketh's hand shook so violently that the Captain held the glass to his lips until he had swallowed the whisky.

"There, old chap! Now take it easy for a bit."

He closed and locked the door, and then silently sat down and waited. He realized that some catastrophe had fallen upon Halketh, and tht he was on the verge of a collapse, but there seemed nothing more for him to do but wait until Halketh spoke again. For some time the two men sat thus. At last Halketh raised his head and said slowly:

"George, I need you—" It seemed as if he could hardly gather words to express himself. "I shall kill him, and you must be my second."

Rutherford was shocked, stunned even, and wondered if the terrific thing which had happened to Halketh had unsettled his reason. With this possibility in mind he answered quietly:

"I'll do anything you want. You can depend on me, you know. But it's late, and you need a good sleep. Have another glass, and then go to bed."

Halketh realized now that Rutherford thought him unsound in mind. He must set him right before going further.

"No, George, I am not crazy. I cannot tell you why I am in this trouble. But I shall fight Ronald! You must arrange it with Harrington—who will act for him. It must be as soon as possible—that is all I insist upon."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SUSPENSE

RUTHERFORD considered before replying to Halketh's amazing demand.

"Ernest," he said slowly, "you cannot mean that. There is some terrible mistake. Take time, think it over, and tell me more in the morning."

But Halketh spoke, and so solemnly, that his friend felt a sudden conviction that things beyond his ken were passing, and that no act of his could change them.

"George," said Halketh, "what is between Ronald and me no man will ever know. It is that which goes with us even beyond the grave. And soon enough he will be there with me!"

Rutherford shuddered.

"You will see Harrington, George?"

Unable to speak, he nodded, and grasped Halketh's hand.

"No one must know, George—of course I need not tell you that. Absolute secrecy in any—every—event! I rely on you."

"Ernest," said Rutherford solemnly, "think! Let me implore you! Only a few hours' time—"

Halketh held up his hand.

"Not a moment, George! All hereafter is not enough to change things. Remember, I am depending on you! Now I will go to bed, old friend, for a bit of a rest. There is much to be done, and I am very tired. But first I must rest. Then to work!"

He reached for the bottle, still standing where Rutherford had set it down, and with a hand trembling so greatly that much of the liquor was spilled, filled his glass with the clear spirit and drank it at one draught. Then, without a word, he threw himself fully dressed upon a divan and passed into a condition more stupor than sleep.

Rutherford sat still for a long time, watching his friend and chief, who remained exactly as he had fallen, after his last words. He tried to think clearly and to reach an explanation for Halketh's sudden and mysterious challenge to Ronald. He considered in turn the usual provocations for such serious action—insult, reflection on one's honor, and jealousy over a woman—and rejected all of them in this case. Then he wisely decided to defer the whole affair until he should see Harrington.

But Harrington had little to say which could offer a promise of a happy outcome. He, too, had been much shocked, and at first refused to take Ronald's request seriously. He, like Halketh, had absolutely declined to discuss the matter. Rutherford and Harrington talked long and earnestly, but, it seemed impossible to settle the affair amicably. They finally decided that each would make another attempt at reconciliation, basing their efforts on ethical considerations such as that the two officers were friends of long standing, and that a duel between them would be a monstrous and unnatural thing.

But both seconds met with complete disappointment. Their principals were not open to argument or reason. The affair must go on to its grim ending, and further discussion was useless and unwelcome. Halketh at last told Rutherford roundly that unless the details of time and place and weapons were given him at once, neither he nor Ronald would delay longer for formalities.

By this time the day was well advanced. Rutherford and Harrington had used every possible excuse to postpone arrangements, in which effort they were helped by the formalities connected with the departure of Lord Lesquith and his suite, the last being an escort of mounted officers for several miles. Once these formalities were past, however, it would become impossible to temporize longer. There would be nothing for it but to carry out the plans for a meeting, fixed for that evening, swords the weapons. But the reluctant seconds, in their own minds, refused to consider the matter hopeless until the last moment should come.

During these sinister hours, Mildred had a very busy and rather trying time. Her husband was still absent, nor could she learn anything as to his return in time for the farewell tiffin to the guests.

"It's really too bad of Ernest," she bewailed, as she hastened about, giving her final orders.

"Isuf! You have left several of these vases empty. Bring some more flowers. They must be filled at once—and you have forgotten to place the extra fans. Hurry! It's late."

The native servant hurried about, while Mildred nervously pulled here and there at the flowers, the silver, the crystal, in general dissatisfaction.

"Nothing goes right today. The table looks horrid—stupid and conventional, just the thing I want to avoid. And if Ernest leaves me alone—there! —how abominable!"

She stamped her foot, for in reaching to give an easier effect to a particularly stiff cluster of blossoms she upset the vase, and the water spread over quite a space of the cloth.

"Isuf!"—the man was just returning with an armful of flowers—"You must change this cloth at once! Call some of the others to help you, or you will be late. Give me those flowers—and the vases—I will arrange them myself."

For the next quarter of an hour Mildred worked herself into an unusual state of nerves, and without at all reaching the effects she desired. At last, in desperation, she hurried the flowers into vases helter skelter, leaving herself barely time to dress before the guests began arriving.

And still no word from Halketh! His wife, however, filled the gap brilliantly. She drew Lesquith aside as soon as she could do so without attracting attention, and told him that her husband had left the Post the night before and had not yet returned, on some urgent mission the nature of which he had kept to himself. That was ample explanation for Lord Lesquith, who was aware of the uncertain situation in the District. He expressed polite regret at the absence of his host.

Mildred was further annoyed at the lateness of three officers of the Post—Rutherford, Harrington and Ronald. She had just decided to order tiffin served, when the three men came in together. Harrington reached her first.

"Lady Halketh, I am late. Will you pardon it? I was called. I regret—I—" He stopped in confusion, realizing suddenly that his senior, Rutherford, should have preceded him. But Rutherford did not seem to have noticed the breach of official social etiquette.

"We were unavoidably detained," he said humbly, "and beg that you will pardon our lateness."

His manner also was so strange and stiff that Mildred wondered. But she did not show it as she said brightly:

"I am sure that only the most important matters would have detained you, so you are forgiven."

She turned to Ronald, and saw at once that his manner also was strained and unnatural.

"Come, Mr. Ronald!" she said with a smile as she held out her hand to him. "Have you an equally good reason for being late?"

He was white, and hesitated before taking her hand. Mildred realized that something was wrong all around. She hastened to relieve the strained situation by announcing tiffin.

From then, the hostess was too busy to think any more about the remarkable behavior of the three officers. At last the fatiguing day was over; at last the guests were gone, and Mildred, with a sigh of real relief, sank down blissfully to enjoy the cessation of the strain she had been under for several days.

And now she went back over the whole affair, passing it in mental review as a success, in spite of so many vexations. Ernest would be pleased, she thought. In the easy progress of the tiffin she felt that his absence had hardly been noticed. Ronald had disappeared immediately afterward, but Mildred had not noticed this, nor that he failed to accompany the escort.

During all those hours Halketh had remained in Rutherford's quarters, most of the time in a kind of stupor, which held him until some time in the afternoon. Then he got up, shaved and dressed with care, and afterwards wrote a letter. As the afternoon waned he took the way to his own quarters, but carefully, even furtively.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE TERRIBLE LOVER

THE windows of the drawing-room stood open. In Mildred's room he could see her form moving about, as she went here and there. For a moment he forgot that all was not as it used to be. He stood watching her as if in a spell. He wondered if it were a dream, or if he were really there.

He was just about to spring forward buoyantly to the steps, to take them three at a time as he generally did, then run up to his wife's room. But as he took the first quick step something pulled him up. It stopped him as the leash stops a hound, and he wondered why he must not go in.

Then it burst over him, and he reeled in the shock it brought. For a moment his brain seemed to clear almost to super-knowledge; the inner eye opened for the millionth part of a second, and he seemed to see beyond. But it passed too quickly for the brain to register it. He only knew that it was something so appalling that he thanked God for the little respite—that he need not know it as it was just yet. For the future—that would be another matter!

The same stupor that had dulled him almost all day mercifully settled over his mind again—as the surgeons administer the ether according to the requirements of the patient who must go under the knife. Sometimes just enough to enable them to bear it. So now the dreamy lethargy slipped down upon him. He was growing to love it in an odd way—this new state of his which brought relief from pain.

How long he had been standing there he could not tell. Then he became aware that she was no longer in the room, though he had not realized when she passed from his view. The side door opened, the one at the end of the veranda, just as it had done—when it had opened before. She came out. He could see a bit of her white gown where the thin dark blue wrap she wore fluttered as she moved. Where would she go?—The same turn—toward the jungle path! She was going to meet her lover—but for the last time, by God!

He followed her stealthily. How she sped along! How well she remembered the path!—far better than her husband, who could hardly keep her in view hurrying over the rough road full of turns and obstacles.

They were well into the jungle now. He felt he must keep tight hold of his brain—it throbbed so heavily that he wondered if it would give way at the decisive moment. Perhaps there would be no need for Rutherford's services, nor Harrington's either! . . .

How was that? Where had she vanished to? He strained his eyes through the dense foliage, but could not see her. Perhaps it was nothing but a dream after all. A frightful nightmare. If he were awake, where was he? Was this the wild path to the jungle, or was he at home in his own bed, just waking from a long, horrifying nightmare? He must have dreamed he saw his wife going before him on this dreary road. How else could she vanish like that?

What was that sound, far in the depths of the jungle? Sounds—sounds of motion—sounds of voices! So it was no dream! It was true—true! The moment had come! It was there; no dream-phantom, but living flesh—flesh that could be cut, pierced, hacked. If only he could remain sane long enough to do what must be done!

He paused, trying to gather himself together, to hold on to every atom of force still left within him—listening! Voices? No, a voice—only one—*hers!* How could he reach them without their hearing him? There—there!—by that little, winding path off the road—straight into the deepest jungle.

And now the sounds grew louder—the articulated words began to reach him! She was happy—happy! The sweetest sounds of coaxing love! He stumbled wildly on.

"My darling! my darling! You are here before me! How I have longed for you—longed for you!—"

Halketh staggered on. The end was near now!

"I love you!—put your head down, close to mine—So!—"

Again that gurgling little laugh! What did it bring back to him—?

"There—closer to me—closer—closer—Ah!—"

How strange! Was that music? Who was playing? What air was that, so sweet, so familiar? He knew it now! The faker played it, long ago, as he came through the thick leaved trees—

"Again, beloved!"

He wondered if he only thought he heard the music.

"Give me love—life—with your lips! Kiss me, kiss me!—"

Just then the dream changed—as dreams will—for he seemed to come out into the clearing, so that he might see his wife at last, in her lover's embrace. In dreams we are never able to move at the right moment; and in this dream Halketh stood as if petrified, not yet free to spring at Ronald.

The dark form beside his wife moved. The Lover's head was rising—rising—Oh, God!—God!—

Dazed, crazed, mad with horror, Halketh covered his eyes with his hands. He looked again, and—*then he realized!* That hooded head—those coils—not Hell itself could offer such a sight, as the terrible Lover kissed her once again! . . .

Suddenly Halketh leaped toward them. The sword destined for Ronald's heart sank deep into the cobra's scaly neck. Again, again, again—once more—and yet once more! And now the dreadful coils writhed in mad, convulsive rings, like giant clock springs gone mad, as Halketh's sword pierced and hacked.

Wild cries rang out. Something sprang at his throat. He felt small pricks like finger nails tearing at his throat—trying to claw their little way into his flesh. So his wife had joined the mad nightmare, too! Why not, when all Hell was loose tonight? Unheeding the tiny might of Mildred's blows, he plunged the sharp sword again and again, until the writhing coils were still enough to turn safely away from. And yet he would rather go on hacking forever, until oblivion should overcome him, than cease and turn to that which must now be met.

Dazed with the utter horror of it all, Halketh seized his wife with such force that her frantic struggles ceased abruptly.

"You demon!" she screamed, "you have robbed me of my love, my happiness, my life itself—"

"Stop it! Stop it!" shouted Halketh, shaking her again, until her teeth rattled. "You are a devil in my poor Mildred's form! I should kill you!" He looked about him for the sword he had tossed aside.

The rough shaking seemed to bring Mildred somewhat to her senses. Seizing his arm, she wailed:

"Oh, Ernest! Pity me! You do not—you cannot understand!"

He stared at her, with horror and crazed bewilderment struggling in his face.

"Ernest!—for God's sake—why did you kill him?"

At this his last faint hope died, and he resigned himself to the fantastic inferno whose quicksands were fast swallowing him up. He gave a ghastly laugh.

"I suppose I am dreaming—nothing seems real any more. I hope nothing is real. Mildred, where are we? What has happened?"

She was weeping. "Oh, Ernest! Let me only collect myself! I know how terrible it must seem to you. But—I cannot live without what you have just seen!"

He remained quite still, gazing stupidly at her.

"I don't understand you, Mildred."

"I know, dear—it will be very hard for you to understand it. I never wanted you to know."

His vacant gaze did not leave her face.

Mildred was coming back more and more to herself. She laid her hand on his arm.

"Shall we go back, dear? I could explain it better to you at home, I think."

"Mildred, you must clear this away now." Halketh was making a supreme effort to retain his consciousness, which he felt slipping away. "Be quick—or I fear I cannot hold out!"

Still panting and trembling, she sought to reply to him.

"Ernest!—my darling husband!"

He shuddered at the endearing words, and she saw it.

"Forgive me, or I shall die!" she wailed. "I am not to blame—oh, Ernest, I am not to blame! Ever since the night when the natives carried me away—years ago—when a cobra stung me as we passed under a tree—I have been unable to live without their poison.

I should have told you—oh, I know I should have told you!"

She wept drearily now, and her husband remained as before, stonily trying to keep his self-mastery.

"Go on!" he said at length.

Mildred struggled to force back the hysterical sobs choking her.

"You know, Ernest, how I lay as if dying—unable to rouse at all, until you gave me a little dog.

"Only then, things began to seem a trifle clearer—more as if I were awaking to life again. And it was the dog that did it. It made me know, vaguely, that I must have animal life about me. But still I did not understand fully. Even at that time I was only partly returned to ordinary consciousness—not yet enough myself to realize what was passing around me, nor within myself. It was only when we met the snake charmer that day, that I understood—at last! I knew, then, what I must have, or perish!"

"God punished me—that you did not perish!" said Halketh, still in the same stony calm.

"Oh, Ernest—Ernest!" she wailed again.

"Go on!" was all he said.

"And then—and then—I saw you hated it—I knew, too, that it was not good or natural, and so I kept the snakes in secret. I needed their bite to keep me bright and gay—to keep me alive. But after a time—you remember, Ernest, when I became so listless here some time ago—I found that the bites of small snakes were no longer enough. I—I needed a stronger stimulant. So I began going out into the jungle, days when you were away—Oh, if you knew how I suffer—to tell you this!" She shook with violent sobs again—terrible sobs which she still forced back, gathering herself for the final effort of confession.

"I wandered in the jungle—I called them—I found them at last, the great cobras—and let them give me life—O, Heaven! How I love it!—"

The last words broke forth involuntarily, her voice rising to a scream—suddenly muffled, however, as Halketh's vicelike hand closed on her throat. He held her so a moment, while she choked and beat the air frantically, then released her as suddenly, so that she fell back upon the ground, moaning, where he let her lie. His icy tones reached her ear faintly:

"I have not yet decided, Mildred. I may kill you tonight. Perhaps you will never leave this place alive."

He stopped and appeared lost in deep meditation. Mildred, almost overcome with horror, crawled, moaning, to his feet. His eyes turned upon her, no other muscle moving. After a moment he spoke:

"No! do not say any more just now. Do not come too near—it may not be safe! I have not yet made up my mind."

The unhappy woman, daring neither to speak nor move, remained as if paralyzed, lying where she was on the ground.

Ten—fifteen minutes passed, in utter silence. Then, slowly, he reached down toward her. As his hand touched her it broke the spell holding her. With a shrill scream, she rolled from him over the rough ground, wailing:

"Spare me! Spare me!"

"Do not fear me, Mildred—now," he said, slowly and gently. "It is true I did not know at first what might be best. But now I have decided. I shall not kill you—wife that was! Perhaps indeed you may not be to blame. But, Mildred—know that I followed you tonight with murder in my heart, for I thought to find you with Ronald as a lover."

She looked up, in utter, dull surprise.

"And I now wish it had been so, rather than—Oh, God! Have mercy!"

His stony composure broke for a moment. He mastered himself, then continued:

"I took you, Mildred, for better, for worse—in joy or sorrow, in sickness and in health, to have and to hold, until death do us part. I therefore, from now on, devote my life to finding a cure for the curse you bear. We will go to England. I will ransack the world for help, and we may yet find happiness again."

He ceased, and Mildred, weeping, threw herself into his arms. Silently he held her trembling, convulsed form. Silently he waited until the wildest agony of her despair was past. Then, with head averted that he might not see again that dark, scaly mass still writhing and twisting, like the seething of some hellish witches' caldron, Halketh drew his wife toward their homeward road. In silence he led her back to the Post, and left her there.

He still had work to do that night. Without a word, he left the home he had not thought to enter again, and hastened for the engagement he had to keep. He knew he was behind the appointed hour.

He reached the duelling ground some twenty minutes late. The men who started forward as he appeared never forgot the sight of his ghastly face. They stood in silence as Halketh walked directly up to his waiting opponent, looking neither to the right nor left.

"Ronald, I wish to apologize. I have done you a great wrong. I have to ask your forgiveness. Do you grant it?"

A wave of intense compassion and sympathy was blended with Ronald's feeling of relief as he clasped Halketh's right hand in both of his.

"Say no more, sir, I beg you!" he said cordially. "Forgive my hastiness, or any fault you saw in me!"

Ronald was more deeply moved than he showed. It had been a solemn experience for him.

"We are friends again, I trust," said Halketh, and then to the others: "Gentlemen, I thank you all and hope for your indulgence. Have I your permission to withdraw?"

They shook his hand silently.

Hours later, as the mystery of dawn was breaking, Halketh went to his room. His wife was lying awake as she heard his step. He passed through her room, and as she felt his gentle touch on her hand, she caught it to her breast.

"Ernest!" she whispered, "have you thought—do you know—what keeps me—alive?"

"I have thought, and I am prepared. We will take *them* with us."

This Strange Story Will be Concluded in the April Issue of WEIRD TALES. The Final Chapters Are Filled with Uncanny Episodes. Don't Miss Them.

A Story of Singular Power That Holds You Spellbound to the Last Word

THE TOAD

By DONOVAN G. FITZPATRICK

I WORKED for him, I lackeyed him, I stooped and cringed at his every behest; yet how I hated him! Well I knew the passions that warred within my heart, and I felt the pain that told how deeply I hated my master. Yet there remained a something which multiplied my hatred ten-fold—I knew not *why* I hated him!

At first there seemed a clashing of our guardian spirits, a dumb combat, a struggle soul to soul, a sharp rout, victory! and his soul always won. And I slunk back in baffled defeat, stung by his easy aplomb, cowed by his overriding will. Then my rancor flamed! For the dull-witted fellow, despite that I shook with rage, did not even sense my ever-present hatred. But laughed in happy abandon, his lips purring a joyful hum, and frolicked about and chucked me under the chin—even as I was on fire, and being consumed with hatred!

While I fawned and smiled and danced at his orders, I was murdering him in my mind.

"Get my spectacles, Gaston!"

"Very good sir," said I, as I mentally pushed him off a cliff.

"Gaston," a little later, "my shoestring has loosened. Latch it up."

"Certainly sir!" I replied, as I buried my teeth in his leg.

"Tie my tie, Gaston!"

"Yes sir," I said, as I strangled him to death.

By such diversion—it was serious, *deadly* serious to me—did I make my early servitude tolerable. But there came a time when my mind, stimulated though it was, could devise no new methods of wreaking my master's downfall.

Then I was beside myself with despair.

My master loved no man, or woman, or child. But all the love within him went out to his toad. It was a great toad, more ponderous than a fowl, and far uglier than any other of that ugly race. Long folds of sickly skin drooped from its stunted frame. And bristling on that unhealthy surface was every manner of hills, valleys, volcanoes, all twisted and contorted as by a fiendish hand. Thin rivers of slime ran athwart its frame. It poisoned the air with its presence.

But this perfection of ugliness was marred by the eyes. Wondrous jewels of light, aflame with love and understanding, they sought the realm of the spirit, they cried for God and eternity. Thus, while its repulsive self made me loathe the toad, those eyes struck me

with fear—a fear that cut into my vitals, haunting my dreams. I hated my master; I *dreaded* the toad.

To my master though, the toad was all things dear. A mere glance at the creature would send the bloom into his cheeks. Hours at a stretch he gazed at the toad, as enwrapped, as impassioned, as any swain who looks into the eyes of his ladylove. For the toad was his life. Thrice the old fellow was drawn unto death. In his dying prayers he called for the toad, which, when brought, behold! like a miracle of old his life-force returned.

Throughout the day the toad was his bodyguard; it proved an elixir whose presence toned his being. When it strayed from his vision, the man was thrown into a torment; he shook, he trembled, he gasped like a dying fish. And only the toad's speedy return would ease him into security. Hours at a time, the fellow communed with the toad, his voice sunk in reverence, and his eyes blazing with affection. He patted its knobby head, caressed its horny back, rocked it in a mad orgy of love. Whilst the toad, in grotesque apery of a cat, circled about, wiping its scum on his clothes.

The master took an unholy delight in the toad's care. He rigged up a trap to catch flies, and fed them one at a time to the toad, smacking his lips in vicarious joy as the creature gorged. Each day the toad was given a bath. And its doting owner flooded the foul body with perfume. Delicate scales told the daily story of the toad's health, while a doctor, skilled in the treatment of toads, awaited the master's summons.

Bismark—so the fellow named his pet—was allowed the full freedom of the house. On cool, damp days he plodded about the room, tagging at his master's heels, or squatting beside his arm-chair. When the weather was warm and sticky, he retired to a dark corner of the kitchen and clambered into a basin of water—his swimming pool. When it rained, he perched on the window sill, listening with drowsy bliss to the patter of the raindrops.

If Bismark was the privileged character in the house, he was indeed the lord of all below. A tiled runway, built for the toad, led to the cellar. Here was constant dampness, clamminess, mustiness. The ground was coated with black ooze. Girding this area were crumbling bricks with blotches of yellow moss. Time and the elements had here wrought a sickly little valley. For there was now a chiseled slope to a corner, toward which trickled a network of muddy streams. And, hidden beneath the overhanging walls, in a tiny nook of darkness, was a cavelike break in the ground.

Into this hollow the miniature rivers fell. That hidden hollow, indiscernible in the full light of day to the acutest eyes, was the only outer manifestation of the ground's unsoundness. Winter after winter, great floods of water swept into the basement. Each time the underground cavity licked up the deluge. Thus was the cellar happily drained at all seasons. Another purpose the cavern served—it was the private home of the toad. Here Bismark passed the nights in peace. His voice was seldom heard, and even then it was filled with lazy content. So through the years the toad dwelt in the cellar.

Despite the calm that reigned over the house, I felt a deep, underlying distrust. Each day I became more nervous and suspicious. The close companionship of toad and master made me a stranger. I became convinced that they were plotting against me.

One night, as I was brooding over these affairs, my mind darkly abstracted, I stepped squarely upon the toad. The creature shrieked a blood-curdling cry, and I stumbled backward, leaning against the wall, while a nameless terror possessed me. The master uprose on the instant, and with one leap he was upon me. His heavy cane beat me down, drumming upon my bones.

Then I regained my senses. With one movement I wrenched the cane from his grasp. Then I clubbed him to death.

THE murder accomplished, I endeavored to find a safe means of disposing of the body. I at once considered the cave in the cellar. It seemed providentially designed for my purpose. Not a particle of earth was brushed loose as I slid the short, thin body through the little cave. Presently, a dull thud—the corpse had fallen into the pit below.

I located some clay at no great distance from the house, and very speedily repaired the breach in the wall. So expertly did I work, that even the closest inspection defied discovery. It was spring, the rains were over, and the summer days would cake the new wall into lasting hardness. I felt secure.

I now hunted the creature that had caused my trouble, determined to kill it at sight. Even as I beheld the toad, I marvelled at my change of feeling. I felt something akin to pity as I noted its mangled form. Then, as I continued to gaze, my old dread of the toad swept over me. I quitted the spot and shunned the toad henceforth.

After a decent interval, I reported my master's disappearance to the police. They responded at once, and as I had foreseen, made an exhaustive and rigid inspection of the cellar. Many times my heart sank as their sharp bitted axes struck within inches of the false wall. But I silently chuckled in turn. For my hiding-place stood the test and the wearied men at last gave up the search.

Then their attention was drawn to the toad. Bismark had been an interested spectator at this investigation. He wore a mournful expression, while a wild fever burned in his eyes. He camped in the fateful corner, clambered against the false wall, even brushed crumbs of dirt from the new clay. And by persistent cluckings, by most untoadly contortions of his body, by every means of communication save actual speech, he was trying, it seemed, to tell an awful secret.

The investigators were amused at the toad's antics; they gathered in the corner and watched him with heavy interest. They pulled the toad away from the false wall, and laughed as he invariably returned. Finally Bismark desisted, and, with a beaten air, faced about and looked fixedly at the investigators.

"Do you know," remarked one, "I think that toad is trying to tell us something!"

"Perhaps," responded another, "he is trying to tell us where the lost man is."

I nearly swooned. A confession of guilt rose to my lips, and I turned to beg mercy. Then I laughed outright. The investigators were joking about the toad and poking fun at the men who had made the remarks. Presently the investigators departed.

YEARS winged by, and my secret remained undiscovered. I became happy and carefree. The murder seemed a distant dream; at times I even persuaded myself that those black memories were but the offspring of my disordered fancy. The investigators returned, and returned again, all to no purpose. Confident of my safety, I greeted them with genuine welcome: I recounted at length the singular friendship of the man and the toad; I informed them frankly that I had always hated my master.

From a worldly standpoint, I had reason to be happy. My master had no heirs and he left the estate to me. I, as the executor, was charged to care faithfully for the toad. That was the only provision of the will. I congratulated myself on the crime that had elevated me from servant to master—*from servant to master!* Joyfully I repeated the phrase

and I chortled with glee that the authorities were none the wiser.

Every precaution was taken, you may be sure, to keep my hiding place intact. The winter rains with their influx of water into the basement, threatened to demolish the false wall. What if the investigators should call as streams of swirling water poured into the pit? Such a happening would seal my fate. I speedily acted.

Each night, over a period of many months, I added a pail of clay, no more, to the ground beneath the cellar steps. About the house I planted deep-rooted vegetation, crowding it as thickly as it would grow. I thus checked my enemy, the rain.

Through these years of calm I derived great amusement from my relations with the toad. I lost the dread that he had once provoked; he now moved me to merriment. Ofttimes I whiled away an evening with Bismark. Placing him on a chair, and taking an opposite seat, I carried on ironic conferences. I thanked him profusely for having caused my good fortune. I wiped imaginary tears from my eyes as I mockingly narrated my master's virtues. I asked Bismark confidentially, if he didn't think I had done a neat job in disposing of the old fellow. Then I would tell Bismark how much I liked him, and endeavor to shake hands.

The toad's reactions to this treatment were tragically comical. His out-reaching intelligence seemed to grasp the import of my speech. He would quiver and shake, and, if my eyes deceived not, be actually shriveled at mention of my crime. And, though I little heeded, then, he manifested a very deep hatred for me.

Bismark had visibly altered since his master's death. He ate little; for a long period following the murder, he had starved. He was now a sickly mass of folds and wrinkles. The light died from his eyes and they became hard and steely. He lost whatever animation he had once had. Sometimes I thought he was dead, as he lay stiffly on the floor, letting the ants run at will over his body. Yet—and at this I wondered and was strangely disturbed—he seemed to cling to life, defying death, for a set purpose.

At last the toad crawled away and returned no more. A vast relief upbore me; gone, now, was this ugly shadow of my master, gone the witness and constant reminder of my crime. Pleased by the thought, I hastened to blot out every association of the deed. I burned that emblem of murder, the cane. The dead man's arm-chair, and his picture which still glowered at me from the wall, were fed to the flames. I called builders and had the murder spot converted into a closet—a closet which I took care never to enter. New floors, new furniture, new decorations, new wall paper, put a new and pleasant face on the interior. Coats of bright paint, on the sides and on the roof without, proclaimed that the dead past of the house was buried. So passed from view, and so passed from my mind, the relics of a less happy day. I reasoned with great logic that the murder, from a practical aspect, had never occurred.

OTHER years sped lightly by, and I grew fat and prosperous. The world greeted me with kindly eyes, and I beamed an answering beam upon the world. I completely forgot the past; I gazed with pleasant anticipation toward the future. Soon, if all went well, I would be happily married.

Then the rains broke forth! Driven by thunder and lightning, a great cataclysm, terrible in power, beat and shook and rocked the ground. Lakes piled over the land. Still unsatisfied, the downpour continued; days, weeks, months, the unending deluge descended. At length, with devilish malice, immense floods invaded my cellar. In a twinkling, they had burst the false wall and were hurtling themselves into the pit. I chilled with anguish—that secret which had withstood the years was uncovered at last!

Ah! but the disappearance, had it not been forgotten? Years before, the investigators had given up the search, had told me that they despaired of ever solving the mystery. Their reappearance, then, was unlikely. Thus I composed myself, resolving that, with the flood over, I would fill the pit with clay. Then I should defy the devil himself to expose my secret.

These meditations were broken by a jingling of my telephone. *It was a call from the police!* They would arrive directly! I beat myself in a fit of madness. What fate was this, that they should wait for years, and then swoop upon me at the exact instant my secret lay bare? I toddled to the cellar, and in a dumb trance, watched the rushing water as it tumbled into the pit.

Suddenly the water stopped its downward flow and banked itself beside the wall. Rapidly the false wall was being hidden by a sheet of water. Then I sank on my knees and thanked God. The pit had filled! Water screened the false wall! *My secret still defied discovery!*

Blithely I entered the house, settling myself in an easy-chair, and resolved to welcome the police with the utmost nonchalance. Gay and blustering, like a troop of picknickers they descended upon me.

"Guess what we came for!" cried an investigator, slapping me heartily on the back.

I read irony in his tone. "Why-y—," I stammered, "you came to search for the dead man! Of course! Of course! Go right ahead, gentlemen! and if I—"

The man bent a keen look upon me. "How do you know he's dead?"

I wilted. Luckily, I was struck dumb and remained silent.

"No," he went on in playful pomposity, "official duties did not inspire our mission. Our visit is purely social. We called to see Bismark! *Bismark!* the wonderful toad. Where is he?"

"Bismark," I echoed. "Yes! Yes! I might have known it. You are right sir! —he *is* a wonderful toad!—and a toad of great intelligence, sir. Did I tell you—"

"But," gently insisted the investigator, "where is he?"

"Ah, sir," I replied, "the toad was wretched after his master's—disappearance; he became sick and weak, and one day he crept away, never to return. Without doubt, the toad is dead."

At that moment a wild and terrible wail came from below. Age-long sorrows of earth and hell rolled from an awful throat, and it was *calling, calling—*

We rushed below. We stopped short and they gasped in wonder, and I gasped in knowledge and deep dismay. Half the cellar had caved in! Still-foaming water filled the ghastly pit! At length the watter stirred uneasily and bubbles ruffled its surface. Then, from those depths, there rose a human skull.

It turned its leering face upon us and stared profoundly from its empty sockets. Slowly, then, the skull's jaw spread the water and it labored toward the shore. It grounded. It strained mightily to climb from the water. It pushed upward and shook and trembled on the brink. Then, with a sigh and a splash, back into the pit it fell.

Unwearied, calmly resolved to find a landing-place, the skull cruised and cruised about. Again and again, at many different points it flung itself toward the land; again and again with unvarying monotony it tumbled backward, down into the pit. Finally the skull retired to the opposite bank and, gathering speed, raced through the water. With a leap, it cleared the pit and thudded to the ground.

The skull steadied itself, dragged its thumping bones forward and halted at my feet. It raised its streaming face and

(*Continued on page* 82)

There's a Psychic Riddle in

THE STATEMENT OF ARCHIBALD SWAYNE

By BURTON PETER THOM

THE doctors say that I have only a short time to live. They are right. My heart is so bad that I have to lie propped up in bed because I cannot breathe lying down. A few weeks at most is the longest I can last. My legs are waterlogged and my lungs are beginning to fill up. Digitalis helps me very little now, and when that fails —good night.

This is written in an asylum for the criminal insane. Society has adjudged me a criminal and the doctors say that I am insane. The former I am, but the latter I certainly am not. For my crime, although I have never considered what I did a crime, I am paying the penalty—and I am paying it without whimpering, but I do object to being classed as a lunatic.

I would not care so much—I would take it as part of my punishment—if it did not prevent me from trying to right a grievous wrong. For whatever I say, or whatever I write, is discounted because of the supposed aberrancy of my mind. But since I know my end is very near I am writing this despite whether it will be read as the vaporing of a disordered intellect or not. Under the circumstances it is all I can do, and if I did not do it I would be more miserable than I am for the little time that remains to me.

This is written to clear the name of a dead man. Robert Q. Emory did not kill Dr. Kendall. I killed him. I am aware that it will be at once objected to that as this is written Robert Q. Emory is not dead and that I am Robert Q. Emory. In part, this is true. The body of Robert Q. Emory still lives, in a very dilapidated state, but his soul has departed from it for some time—about eighteen months, to be exact. My soul, my intelligence, my identity, has inhabited the body of Robert Q. Emory since immediately before the killing of Dr. Kendall, and it was my personal ego that motivated his body to commit the murder. I obsessed his body and used it as an instrument to avenge myself upon my enemy. Therefore I can say with absolute truth that he is innocent and that I am guilty.

I am Archibald Swayne, and in the body of Robert Q. Emory I killed Dr. Kendall. That is the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

It is not necessary here to go into the details whereby I learned that Kendall was my enemy. It is enough to say that I unmasked him as a trickster and a liar when he set up the wall I could not climb, and shattered my fondest hopes and broke me. He did it for no reason. Because he did it for no reason I destroyed him.

Now, you will say, the slate is clean, the balance even, but it is not. I hate him now more than I believe I hated him then, and I welcome death and am glad that it is near, because so much the sooner will I come to grips with him again. In the realm of shadows I will strike him as I have struck him here, and in the worlds beyond, if he flees that far, I will follow him.

AS a psychologist I was, and am, not unknown. My monographs on "The Will" and "The Fundamentals of Character" are accepted as authoritative. I have also some reputation as a mathematician, or rather that branch of it which is included in the domain of metaphysics, transcendental mathematics, which was developed by the mystics of antiquity and more recently by Zollner, Hinton, and Einstein.

Into the mysteries of hyperspace I have penetrated farther than any man now living. I am one of the few who can say that physically I have been in the fourth dimension. It was while in this plane that I learned that J. Ensley Kendall had betrayed me. I read his thoughts as if they were an open book. When I returned to three dimensional space I went to him and accused him of his treachery and upbraided him. He listened. It even seemed to me that he listened patiently.

When I was through, and I know that I spoke loudly and excitedly, he simply said, "Is that all?"

I could have throttled him then and there. I felt hot and cold. My legs gave under me and I trembled. I tried to speak, but could not. He put his hand on my shoulder and said, "You're not feeling well, old man. You'd better go home and go to bed." I don't know why I did it, but without another word I left him.

After that the persecution began. Wherever I went I was followed. Once, when a particularly uncouth individual was following me, I turned and asked him what he wanted. He answered, "You're talkin' through your hat. Beat it, or I'll hand yer one."

It made me brood, and brooding is not good; too much of it rots the soul and turns the milk of human kindness into gall.

I began to be persecuted in another and still more devilish way. Voices spoke to me. They whispered in my ears while I was lecturing to my class. They jeered me when I walked the streets. When I sat alone they sometimes fairly yelled at me. They kept me awake at nights so that I became haggard for want of sleep. They called me fool and coward and many another names too vile to write.

I am well aware that in certain forms of insanity, especially dementia praecox and paranoia, hallucinations of sound are not uncommon. But I was not insane. The processes of my mind worked as smoothly as ever. If I were superstitious I would probably have attributed them to disembodied spirits, but this I knew to be absurd.

Finally I solved the problem. It was so absurdly simple that I was actually ashamed of my stupidity in not having done so before. The voices that tormented me, that were driving me almost to the verge of insanity were nothing more than the voice of J. Ensley Kendall speaking to me from fourth dimensional space. He had evidently filched the secret from me; although I have never been able to determine how he did it. Probably he gained surreptitious access to my notes and apparatus.

He undoubtedly had the opportunity to do so.

Patience has its limits, and the limits of mine had been reached. I had no thought of using violence to put a stop to the persecutions to which I was subjected. That would be the last resort. I wrote to Kendall and implored him to stop. He replied in a cunningly-worded letter in which he denied that he had ever injured me in any way. It was the last straw. I decided to kill him—this rat who had gnawed at my heart strings until they were ragged and raw. He deserved to die.

More and more the voices—his voice—gibed and shrieked at me, but I was no longer concerned. They would stop. I began to think of a plan. This was difficult to do, because, while many suggested themselves to me, when I examined them closely none of them were feasible. It was not only necessary that I should kill him, but it was also necessary that the punishment should fit the crime and—most necessary of all—that it should be done with safety to myself. Not that I had any personal fear of Kendall, but that I would not fall within the clutches of the law. After awhile it came to me, and I worked it out to the last detail.

Robert Q. Emory and I had known each other for many years. We were acquaintances rather than friends, but for each other we entertained a high regard. It was quite by accident that I heard that he was ill and it was only the natural and proper thing for me to call and inquire about him. He lived alone (he had been a widower for many years) except for an ancient housekeeper, and he was not so sick that he could not see me. I had always admired him for his vast and abnormal strength. His hulking shoulders and deep chest, the thick columnar neck and the long, thick arms, and his fingers, bony, spatulate and strong, offered a striking contrast to my weak and puny body. When he shook hands with me, his crushing grip brought a thought that thrilled me: What a strangler this man would be! If only I were like him I could throttle my enemy with my bare hands. With the strength that was in those apish arms I could tear him apart. I could crush his life out against that hairy chest like a bear. In order to grasp my idea it is only necessary to remember that from the fourth dimension the interior of a solid is as much exposed as the interior of a plane.

He motioned to me to take a seat, and as I did so I invoked the formula that transported my ego into hyperspace. My body I left sitting in the chair. I entered into his body and took possession of his brain.

His spirit struggled mightily, but it was no match for mine. While I could not expel it, yet I could prevent it from exercising any further control over its body. Since I held the citadel of the brain my rule was absolute.

To enter a living organism was a new experience for me. The sensation was strange, especially as the personality which controlled it offered a most strenuous resistance. I almost instantly realized that his brain was not as keen and fine an instrument of thought as my own. It worked more slowly and with less precision.

I could see my body lying there very pale and still. It was very unfortunate that the transposition had not been made in my laboratory, where I could have used my apparatus. With it I could have made a physical exit from three dimensional space and thus could have concealed my body. As it was, I would be obliged to run the risk of letting it remain in Emory's apartment until my return. Any one seeing it would take it for granted that I was dead.

It was impossible to foresee, however, what might happen to it while I was away. It could be easily rendered uninhabitable by an inquest or by the embalming process of an undertaker, or if, by any chance, my spirit did not reenter it before the chemical changes which cause rigor mortis had set in. I therefore had to act quickly.

I hastily dressed myself, although I had some difficulty locating various needful articles of wearing apparel. I closed the door of the room and locked it and put the key in my pocket. The housekeeper was not about, and I left the apartment unobserved. The better to conceal my movements I did not use the elevator. It happened that the doorman was not about, and no one saw me leave.

After walking several blocks I hailed a taxi. In less than twenty minutes I was ushered into Dr. Kendall's office. There were two patients waiting to see him, and it was not long before I was ushered into his consulting room.

"I don't think that I have ever seen you before," he said, as I sat down.

"No, you have not," I replied, "but you will know who I am in a moment."

THERE must have been something in the way I spoke, or the expression on my face, that gave him pause and alarmed him. He half rose from his chair, but with that I was on him. I gripped him by the throat with one hand and smashed him in the face with the other. He clutched and struck at me, but his strength was naught compared to mine. The room was large, and there was no noise of furniture overturned, or crash of broken glass to bring help. He sank to the floor, still struggling feebly, and I throttled him where he lay, and as he slowly died I told him who I was—I, Archibald Swayne in the body of another.

I stood up. I was a little out of breath, for it must be remembered that the body which I had borrowed had risen from a sickbed. My enemy lay dead at my feet. His head was bent back, and his face was black and twisted. His tongue lolled out between his swollen, bluish lips and his wide open eyes seemed as if they were about to burst out of their sockets.

His spies would dog my steps no longer. The voices that had tormented me would be silent now forever. A strange calm came over me, and for the the first time in a long while I felt at peace. Not quite. I had to get away. The stimulus of my action was still unspent, and it enabled my intelligence, even in the dull brain in which it was imprisoned, to act promptly and logically.

I visualized in my mind whether the thing on the floor could be seen when I opened the door to go out. It was evident that it would, so I dragged it to one side. I smoothed my clothes, which were somewhat disarrayed, and passed into the foyer. The attendant gave me my hat and opened the door to the street. As I went down the steps I heard the telephone ring. In a few minutes what I had done would be known. I hurried down the street as fast as I could go without breaking into a run. I looked back when I turned the corner, but no one had come to the door. It made me feel a little safer. Just then an empty taxi came by, and the driver pulled up at my hail. Once in the taxi I felt safe. I knew that I had not been seen to enter it, and that neither the nurse nor the doorman knew who I was. As soon as I could resume my own body, detection would be impossible. My desire was to get back to Emory's apartment as quickly as possible, but in order to make assurance doubly sure I told the driver to drive downtown, my purpose being to return to the apartment by a roundabout way. It was my fatal mistake; that, and the mischance of the card. But even the finding of Emory's name and address would not have frustrated my plan. I would have still had time, had I returned directly to the apartment.

MY arrest and trial and commitment by the lunacy commission I shall not dwell on. During the three years that I have been here I have many times attempted to go into fourth dimensional space, but I have never been able to do so. This has been because of the inferior mental instrument I have been obliged to use. The soul of Emory has long since vacated his body. He is dead; only his body lives. I had hoped so to develop his brain that its cellular elements would react sufficiently to allow me to pass into fourth dimensional space again, and while there to select some body with a first class brain. But for the reason given I could not do so. Shortly after I came here the body which I inhabit began to show signs of deterioration in that a severe form of heart disease became manifest. Its rapid progress made me realize that further effort was useless. I have become resigned.

To prove that I am not insane I shall conclude this statement with an exposition of hyperdimensional space. In order to do so it is absolu—

Here the manuscript ends abruptly. The writer's theory or explanation of the fourth dimension was never given. It is to be regretted that he was not able to do so; it undoubtedly, would have been most interesting. The crippled heart suddenly went from bad to worse, and in twenty minutes from the time the last word was written he was dead.

If this was simply a narrative composed by a patient with dementia praecox, or some other form of insanity, it would possess comparatively slight interest except as an example of the thought processes of a lunatic, but when the facts are known it will be found to be much more than that. It is a psychic mystery in which an occult explanation is easier to believe than a scientific. In fact, no scientific explanation can be offered. The theory of split personality, or of dual personality which might be invoked, cannot possibly apply, because neither take into account the obsession of more than one individual.

Swayne is dead, and Emory, also Kendall, slain by —let the reader form his own opinion. These are the facts.

The narrative states that Archibald Swayne was a psychologist. He was, and, more, he was most distinguished. It is also known that he was deeply interested in higher mathematics and had frequently expressed his belief in spatial dimensions other than those recognized by the senses. It has been further established that he was a close friend of Dr. Kendall for many years. It is known, too, that this friendship was suddenly broken off a few months before Kendall was murdered. During this period Swayne's conduct was observed to have been markedly erratic; so much so, that his friends and relatives seriously considered having him placed under restraint. The letter that he wrote to Kendall, which is mentioned in the statement, was found among the latter's papers, and there is no question but that the writer was insane.

Emory, so far as known, had no acquaintance with the murdered man. He was a widower, without children, and retired from business. As the manuscript states he was an exceptionally powerful man. His acquaintance with Swayne cannot be traced, but it can be easily assumed because of their mutual membership in the Colonial Golf Club. Up to the moment of the crime, there is no reason to suspect that Emory was insane.

On the day of the murder Emory was visited by Swayne. He was just recovering from a severe attack of rheumatism and was still in bed. What conversation occurred between them is unknown, but the testimony of the housekeeper was that Emory emerged from the room alone. This she thought strange, especially as she knew that he had hardly recovered from his illness. She did not enter the room until the arrival of the detectives, who found Swayne lying on the floor unconscious. He never recovered consciousness and died that night. There were no signs of violence on the body, but it is most extraordinary to record that the inquest showed no definite cause of death. There was some slight hardening of the arteries and thickening of the membranes covering the brain, which was also wetter than usual, but these changes would hardly cause him to become suddenly unconscious and die in a few hours.

Now, if it was Emory who killed Kendall and wrote this account to exonerate himself, how did he come to know so much of Swayne's past history; not scraps that he could obtain by hearsay, but an intimate and exact cognizance of his private and personal affairs?

It is a question that I do not pretend to answer. There is another paradox that is equally mystifying. If the intelligence of Swayne was in the body of Emory, as asserted in the narrative, how did he come to forget so much of his highly specialized knowledge of psychology and metaphysics? That, too, is an enigma. Was it a coincidence that Emory became insane with a homicidal impulse when Swayne came to see him, and was it a coincidence that Swayne simultaneously became unconscious? It is possible, but not probable.

The opinion of the commentator can be best expressed in the words of Claude Bragdon: "Many cases * * * * are more easily explicable as possession by an alien will, than on the less credible hypothesis that the character, habits and language of a person can change utterly in a moment of time."

Woman Tells Weird Story of Gypsy Life

A STORY of gypsy life, the calm of which was disturbed at times by deeds of violence, was related in Bozeman, Mont., by Mrs. Iva Danner, who testified as a witness against her former husband, Seth Danner, charged with first degree murder.

She was a witness after counsel for Danner had informed the court that the defendant desired to waive any rights prohibiting a wife's testifying against her husband. He said the defense wanted her to talk freely, not only of anything she had seen, but also of anything that might have been communicated to her by her husband, or that she might have heard.

The young woman told of seeing her husband kill Mrs. John Sprouse with an ax and of his burying Mr. and Mrs. Sprouse. She said she was between 2 and 3 years old when the defendant, her cousin, married her mother. She never got out from under his influence, she said, and after her mother died she was married to the defendant.

She described how Danner followed Mrs. Sprouse a distance from their tent, struck her twice with the ax, and then strangled her with a "whang" string. She said her husband told her he killed the woman so that she would not inform on him for having shot the husband a few hours previously.

Here's the Second Installment of the World's Greatest Serial Published by Request

The Transparent Ghost

By ISA-BELLE MANZER

JUST sit down, Goudy and be cool and make the best of itfor my ghost is is a going to follow you every where. I'm Doctor Daily Transparent, Ghost and I called up those men, whom you and your men have cheated here In these rooms, to give you an opportunity to make restitution. to them and also pay Doctor Daily Back what you cheated him out of I am going to stay right here and watch you wright out your checks for every last dollar, you owe them and all you got from me and take the advice of the Doctor's ghost and don't try to short-change any of them. Then, you'll promise to leave this little city of Kent. and you going to also promise and drowe up a Contract that you never start another gambling house as long as you live now if you want to live very long you better not say Know,

"You can write my check first, it not a large sum as you no I've lost Twenty-five Thousand dollars over your card tables, and all of it unfairly. of course, I dont need money now as I am A ghost but you got to pay your debts, eigther here or in the hereafter *** that wright get busy and write out my check and all of the other mens checks Thank you! Mr, Goudyfore my check for the Twenty-five Thousand that you cheated me out of unfairly. now write out all fo the rest and give them all every penney that you took of them now, mind I'm watching you!"

The Doctor Transparent Ghost was angry, but he enjoying the situation hughely, he listened to Old Goudy's stumbling explanations and apologies. He was so numb with fear and dread that he could hardly make out the checkslegibly, and toward the end he stopped and looked all around the larg e. room and explaining—simply I'm A damn. fool I can't see any one to make me do this. But Doctor Daily's ghost took him by the arm and said you can't see any one but you can hear what the ghost tells you to do now if youwant me to let you live," you better hand out them checks !at the sound of theGhost voice Goudy simply handed each man his check and he snapped at anyone who questioned him.

When the processof restitution was nearly completed the ghost said to Goudy "Tell Bolton I want a good, substantial lunch, in a bout thirty munits, "I'm hungry! said the Doctor's Ghost what the matter with you Goudy didn't you know ghosts got hungry, well, old pall they do. and you are a going to join me and you to Jones if you too did drive me to suicide." They declined with a shudder, and the Doctor laughed maliciously. "Goudy. you and jones are too old scoundrels and i hope that some one will choke you boath to death! Oh, dont jump and get so scart I'm not going to do it—I'm too offal hungry. but while I 'm lunching. I suggest that you and Jones pack up your suitcases you've boath got to get out of this town and country you know. and I'm going along and see you buy your ticket's

Bolton him-self served the lunch, his waiters being too much terror-stricken at the thot of serving a man Ghost whose body was in the bottom of Rock-River Bolton tried to flatter the waiters he said he dident mind a little thing like a ghost but he was perceptibly awed when he saw the aparently unassisted manipulations of knife and fork, and the food disappeared some where and not a soal to be seen every thing was so quait not a sound to be heard untill the Doctor heard footsteps going towards the door Hold on. there Goudy and Jones you wait a minute! please I'm going with you too you know!" Goudyhurried all the more, but jones turning his head frequently. to see if the ghost was pursuing them

Oh, I'm here! Doctor Daily Assured them. whenever they turned "dont fear you two is not agoing to lose me!"

At the ticket window. the Doctor's Ghost stood at thear shoulders, the ghost even boarded the train and shared Goudys seat for the first ten or twelve miles of the flight.

"Well, goodby, Goudy and Jones said the ghost And when you cross the Great Divide. as you go through Wyoming be sure I'll be on hand to give you a welcome!" as you land in over in canada so long to you two old raskals. and the ghost left the train and took the next one back to kent city. It was in the after-noon when the ghost returned to kent-city. I've had enough excitement for one day went direct to a picture theater and sat thru a five real picture reveling in one of the most luxury of Box. as he left the picture theater, he saw the Banker and a murchent on the corner of the street and he heard the banker say to the merchent your stenographer clames that the Ghost of Doctor Daily had spoken to him this morning that what he said and i guess some more has heard the Doctors Ghost as the murchent finished the Banker snorting "Bah you cant make me belive that thare is such a thing as A Ghost you are all scart be cause a man was driven to suicide. Know Ghosts I tell you

"You dont belive in ghosts said the Doctor at the Banker shoulder.

"Why, you old skeptic I've been troutting around at your heels all day!' The Banker edged away from the Doctors voice. his eyes bulging you droped your key to your offes and the Doctor picked it upand dangled it in front of the banker say old Top you are a nother old cheat you dont pay your men enough so that thay can scarsely make a liven you better make a rase in all your help salery and bow a bout promoting my brother gorge if you do be sure to say that Doctor Daily Ghost suggested it my brother and I were best if friends you know be fore I jumped into Rock-River and now all that left of Dock is His Ghost he went off laughing

As He went down on the next street on the corner of lovers lain he heard some one speak his name there on a banch sit a girl and a young man the girls eyes were very much inflamed but the Doctor recognized them the Girl was Clara homes and the young man was the Bankers son The doctoe listened in amused silence. The Doctor was a fine man you were engaged to the Doctor you said? Yes "Wewould have been

married in september she murmured tearfullyl

As the Doctor heard Clara Homes tell the young Banker that she had been Engaged to marrey him in the next September his voice, rose to a high pitch. why clara Homes I never asked you to marry me! don't you belive her She just wants to get you to sympathy so you fall in love with her she dieing to have some one to marry her and she thinks if she sheads a few tears you aske her to get married I. don't belive she ever has been Engahed. to any one,

Clara hid her face in her hands cowering and the Young Banker recongnized the Doctor's voice he strained his eyes for a sight of the ghost of Doctoe Daily. "Oh. Mr Ghost why did you come back hear on earth for said the young Banker. pray tell me why you came back for The Doctor grinned an invisible grin. I came Back to see that all you Gamblers and Bankers that cheated the poor men uot of there money pay them back and I .abslutely are going to see that all you crucked Business. men is going to make it wright with all you cheated. in this town of kent city. and you a going to pay them all back Immediately and if any of them refuse to do it it's going to be terrible dangerus And Doctor Daily went a way and left Clara Homes and the young Banker Terror—stricken and they appeared to be stunned

I'll just take A stroll down by the River and see what going on thair said the Doctor to him self. as he was walking through a thick et of bushes he heard the voice of sevril men he went close by them and sit on A log to hear what thay were saying in a plase like this was he knowed it was not for a plesent talk just as he sat down one of the ruffens said to a nother hard looking man Did Yuh, noticed that item in the morning. paper that Mrs Irene Gold-Smith is going to Entertain she is going to give a dinner and a dance to a hundred and fifty guests to morrow evening she is the weltheys man's Wife in Kent-City. and we got to get in to this swell socity some way for there be a lot of dimonds and perls worn that night and we cant miss that chance of get our schare of there fine jewels, your wright but leve it to me we cant go in to swell socity. but I got a friend that will pass in all OK. The Doctor got up and walked away he had lurned that thaie was a robery planed and would be pulled off to morrow evening at Mrs. Gold-Smiths and he wanted to go some plase and think it over to him-self what he better do to get the robers, caught in the act,

Wealth and adventurs well I had my day full of adventurs and I got my twenty-fife thousand back that I'de lost in poker and that means a start on the road to wealth and I have broken up the Black Raven gambling house, and awed a policeman and frightened the young Banker and clara Homes out of their wits and made the old Banker and all the Old Raskles of Business men promis to pay back all that they had took dishonest from the poor men in kent city

Early The Next Evening Doutor Daily went to a Detective office and went in and sat down in a bout five munites the state detective came in Don't get afraid mr Detective said the doctors Ghost I'm here on Business I. the Doctor's Ghost you heard a bout the last few days The Detective was sitting boltup-right, and gripping the arms of his chair, He listened intently to the Doctors voice that issued from invisible lips

"You see, sir, it's like this: as Doctor Daily being a ghost now I have opportunities that I never had before. and I know positively that there is to be a jewel robbery perpetrared to Laidy. Gold-Smiths to-Night I also know who the robbers are I can prevent the robbery. or I can let it go and then recover the stolen jewels and detain the thieves. Which will enable you to prosecute of course. The State has offered a Too thousand dollars reward for their capture of this band of robbers and if I help you to make this Arrest I, want half of it Don't you think that is a fair deal? I recover the jewels and capture the robbers, and all you need do os place them under arrest. Then we split the reward," Isent that fair?

But the Detective Motionless this was a unusual thing he had never heard A Ghost talk and He had never heard that thair was such a thing as a Transparent Ghost, and he was Seriously thinking what to say or do this was mysterious, but suddenly he said if you are Doctor Dailys Ghost what in heaven's name could you do with money?

"I'll tell you, confided the doctors ghost. "be-fore I was dead I. was brok. lost all my money that why i junped in Rock-River Now, that I'm A Ghost I came back to get as much money as I squandered, and if I dont need it I have plenty of Poor friends that does need it that why I want the money.

This Delightful Story Will Be Concluded in the Next Issue of WEIRD TALES. Get It! Read It! Then Try It on Your Banjo.

Expedition Seeks Chinese Monkey

KWEICHOW, where the mysterious non-Chinese tribes of China live and where the famed forked tail monkey is said to dwell, is to be explored by an expedition sent by the National Geographic Society.

Frederick R. Wulsin has been designated to proceed to Peking to organize his staff for the trip. The province to be explored is about the size of Missouri and has a population of 8,000,000. It lies between the Yangtze and West rivers and is as inaccessible as Tibet. Many of the strongholds have never been visited by white men and whole tribes do not know that the world war was fought.

The monkey sought by the expedition is the rhinopithecus brelichi, of which the only evidence available now is a skin. There has been speculation, the Geographic Society says, regarding the possibility of this species being an animal described in a famous passage of Chinese literature as follows:

"Its nose is turned upward, and the tail very long and forked at the end; whenever it rains the animal thrusts the forks into its nose. It goes in herds and lives in friendship; when one dies the rest accompany it to burial. Its activity is so great that it runs its head against the trees; its fur is soft and gray and the face black."

Another Thrilling Installment of
JOHN MARTIN LEAHY'S
Amazing Novel

DRACONDA

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE ATTACK

I LOST no time in getting up on the ledge.

"I'll keep an eye on the entrance," said Henry, "and these fellows behind us. You two give all your attention to the steps."

And we did, or, rather, to the men charging up those steps—which, I have forgotten to say, were broken by two landing-places. No sound came from the watching multitude below or those watchers near us, and from the charging Venusians no cries, no sound of voices even, only those sounds made by their rapid movements.

Some were armed with spears, others with swords, the weapons flashing in that lurid light as though with imprisoned fire. Why they did not use bows and arrows, in the use of which they are proficient, has always been something of a mystery to me. Perhaps, though, there were no bows and arrows at hand, or it might have been for fear of killing some of those Venusians behind us.

And into that anadromous mass we poured our deadly fire. The men had started up with a rush, but, ere a quarter of the ascent even, that rush had abated not a little. Yet on they came, grim and silent as Fate.

"When your rifles are empty," said Henry, "I'll reload them—use your revolvers."

Hardly had he spoken when St. Cloud, who had kept up a rapid and deadly fire, sent his rifle toward him, drawing his revolver as he did so.

I glanced back at the entrance, dark and yawning as the mouth of a cavern. A charge, I thought, would come from there at any instant. But, as I glanced, the place was empty and (it seemed) silent.

The charging Venusians were near the top now. I fired the last bullet in my rifle, dropped that weapon and drew my revolver.

A few seconds, and Death would come leaping to our ledge.

I shot a look at Henry, who had emptied his own rifle and was now reloading St. Cloud's. I say reloading, but at that instant he was looking at the girl. I knew full well what was in his mind. With a yell that must have sounded more like a demon's than a man's, I turned and emptied my revolver into the crowd. To my amazement, it was beginning to waver now—waver when, with awful toll, it had attained the top.

"Give it to 'em—they're losing heart!" shouted Henry.

He dropped the rifle and drew his revolvers.

"They're beginning—*look out!*" he yelled.

The Venusians had halted confusedly, some, indeed, already were falling back, and from their midst came wild cries and yells and the groans of the wounded and the dying—a confused, terrible sound. But what had caused Henry to give his warning cry was the spears: the words were still in the air when they came, eight or ten of them—I don't know how many. Down went St. Cloud and I, flat on the stone, or as flat as the circumstances would permit—my sudden movement nearly precipitating me over the edge into that dark depth below.

And, at this very instant, through all that tumult and horror, came the sound, loud, unmistakable, of armed men behind—to be precise, behind and to the right.

The spears drove in all around us, the blade of one sending up a shower of sparks as it cut along the stone past my face. Every one of us, including the girl, was struck, though (it was nothing less than a miracle) not a one with point or blade.

Henry's revolvers barked. I came to my knees. The Venusians—who, had they pressed forward, would have destroyed us incontinently—of a sudden turned and started down the steps in the wildest confusion.

I looked behind. What had happened at the top of the steps had brought those Venusians in the entrance to a halt. I waited, hoping there would be no occasion for further spilling of blood; but St. Cloud began firing into their midst, whereupon they turned and vanished into the darkness whence they had come, leaving two wounded and one dead man there on the floor behind them.

"Praised be Nike!" cried Henry Quainfan. "I thought we were goners that time."

"Praised be Jehovah!" said I.

I turned and watched the men fleeing down the steps, several of whom were felled with bullets from St. Cloud's rifle.

"Hold on, Morgan!" exclaimed Henry. "Let the poor devils go!"

St. Cloud slowly lowered his Winchester, looking at Henry with disgust depicted on his handsome features.

"Yes—let 'em go!" he exclaimed angrily. "Every man that gets away means one more for the next attack."

"Good Lord!" Henry exclaimed.

Then in a changed voice:

"If you keep that up, you won't have a single bullet for the next attack—if there is another."

"If there is!" exclaimed St. Cloud. "Do you think they won't make us pay for this? Just wait till they recover their wits!"

He looked about him anxiously, a little wildly even.

"Here's where this mad journey of ours ends—in a heathenish, bloody place of sacrifice, in battle and madness."

"In battle perhaps," said Henry Quainfan, "but not in madness."

"It is mad!" exclaimed St. Cloud. "All this—and worse than madness! We should have known in that mad beginning: the Almighty—"

"Lord help us!" interrupted Henry.

"You're too late!" St. Cloud told him.

"Cheer up, Morgan," Henry smiled. "While there's life, there's hope, you know."

"Bosh!" said Morgan. "And we'd need it all if there was."

Of a sudden that smile of Henry's vanished, his face becoming hard and bleak. Not a little surprised, I wondered what had come to make this change, for I knew that his eyes had fallen on nothing to cause it. His gaze wandered over the steps, dotted with dead and wounded Venusians, over the

multitude below and into the darkness and the mystery of night.

I broke the silence.

"What's the matter?" I asked him.

He looked at me quickly, then turned his eyes to the girl.

It was a little while ere he spoke:

"You remember, Rider, what I said I would do if death proved inevitable: I was on the point of doing it when they wavered. Another second—"

He shuddered, and Mynine, who knew that he had spoken of her, looked up at him with wondering (and wondrous) eyes.

"That," I told him, "should be left to God."

"Let 'em go!" came St. Cloud's voice.

He turned his look to Henry.

"I suppose," he said, "you're the fellow who wouldn't lend the devil a knife when he wanted to stab himself!"

Henry Quainfan laughed outright—the sound startling in that awful place.

St. Cloud muttered something unintelligible and turned his dark look back to the steps. One of the men there suddenly began screaming. He struggled into a sitting position, to his feet, clutched wildly at the empty air, collapsed and went rolling down to the landing-place, where he lay an inert and silent heap.

"O God," said St. Cloud, "why from heaven (or hell) to this prison and madness of the flesh?"

Followed a quarter of an hour or so of expectant waiting, when we saw a deputation with a big *white* flag coming toward the steps.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

THE TREACHERY OF THE WOLF

THE little party came slowly up the steps, headed by The Wolf himself, the flag-bearer just behind him.

Henry descended from the place where we had made our stand and, with the barrel of the Winchester in the hollow of his left arm, stood awaiting the Venusians, none of whom was armed.

Near the top of the steps, they halted. For a few moments, there was an awkward pause. Then The Wolf opened negotiations—in pantomime.

The attack, he said, was deeply regretted; let there be peace—here he went through the motions of drawing a blade from the empty scabbard at his side and breaking the weapon across his knee, and pointed significantly to Henry's rifle—let there be peace, said Ta Antom, and accord him the pleasure of giving us safe conduct to the city of Loom, to Draconda, the queen.

A man of cunning was our handsome Ta Antom. He had no intention at all of conducting us safe to the queen. Already had he formed those plans with which he hoped to bring death upon us—more horrible than death here in battle—in that underground sepulcher of the ancient inhabitants of Loom.

Peace, Henry gave him answer, was our desire, and a speedy journey to Draconda; but, at the first sign of treachery, we would slay, slay, slay. Also, he made Ta Antom understand, no harm was to come to the girl.

This last, I noticed, displeased not a little the purple-robed men of the deputation—who, of course, were priests—but, after that momentary flash of displeasure, they gave no unacquiescent signs.

The maiden, Ta Antom assured him, would be as safe as ourselves.

In order to be brief, I will leave something to the imagination and merely say that the matter ended (or, rather, began) in our returning to the city, though, when leaving that terrible place, we feared greatly that the Venusians would put an end to us.

However, there was not the least sign of hostility: we didn't know The Wolf.

And now came a thing that gave us no little concern: with tears streaming down her cheeks, the girl made us understand that she dare not leave us—that to do so would mean instant and horrible death.

What on earth were we to do?

Henry Quainfan ran his fingers through his curls, a way he had when perplexed.

"We've got an armful now," he said.

We had indeed, and one that I feared was going to bring us trouble.

"We can't let them get their heathenish claws on her again," said Morgan.

"Of course not," Henry returned. "But a lady in the party, and one so lovely—heavens, I never figured on that!"

"I fancy," I told him, "that there are a few other things unfigured."

"Oh, well," he added, "it won't be long before we get to this wonderful queen of theirs. Heaven only knows what will happen then."

"I wonder," said Morgan, "if we will find Draconda as lovely as this young lady of ours. You know, I believe she is—with a single exception—the most beautiful woman I have ever seen."

"One thing I've noticed, though," Henry said: "her wonderful loveliness is marred by something—something elusive, mysterious. I don't know what it is, where it is; but I think it's in the eyes."

"I think you're seeing things," St. Cloud told him. "But how does this mysterious something strike you?"

"Our Mynine would make a terrible enemy."

St. Cloud gave his dark smile.

"She'll never be that—to us, I mean."

"Of course not," Henry smiled back.

Needless to say, we did not feel very safe this night, even though we had been permitted to return to the city unmolested. Something might happen at any moment. There was no telling what treachery might be afoot.

One of our rooms was occupied by our fair charge. Henry said he would take the first turn at watching and would awake me to relieve him in about two hours. St. Cloud and I lay down, though I feared I could not get to sleep, what with those terrible pictures of our fight at the temple that came and went in my closed eyes. So tired was I, however, that the pictures soon became blurry, then faded, and I sank into troubled sleep; and without was Henry keeping his vigil, eyes and ears keen for possible treachery.

But nothing happened this night.

By nine o'clock all was ready for the start.

Mynine's father and mother had come, evidently persons of wealth and position—though it was patent that they stood in no little awe of the head priest, dubbed by Henry the archbishop. And here I may as well give that diabolical plot which had brought about all this terrible business.

Of course, at that time we did not know it; what follows we learned from Draconda.

The victims for sacrifice were chosen *by lot*: to be by lot, however, a thing must be left to chance. Mynine was the only child, and the girl out of the way, at least half of the family wealth (on the extinction of the family, in which the priests could lend Atropos a hand) would go into the sacred coffers, the rest to the crown. In this lottery of death, however, the Loomian sovereign had no voice—unless, indeed, he (or she) had a victim in mind: what I mean is, no power resident in the crown could stay the doom pronounced.

However, the cavalcade started, with no little gratitude and apprehension on our part—the lamentation of mother and father filling the air, the maiden sobbing in a suppressed but terrible manner, as we rode away.

Hour after hour passed; nothing of import happened. A little after sunset, we rode into a small town, where we passed the night. The rising sun found our cavalcade in motion. We were still

travelling on that great highway, which ran away to the city of Loom—and beyond.

Before us, extending from the east to the west, was a beautiful, though (comparatively speaking) low range of mountains.

It was about mid-afternoon when we came to it—that road leading off to the right and into which The Wolf turned.

We halted.

Didn't the great highway go on to Loom?

Oh, yes, The Wolf made answer, but this way was shorter.

I turned to Henry.

"What do you think of it?" I asked him.

"I think we may as well follow."

"The longest way round," said St. Cloud, "is sometimes the shortest way—I can't say home in this instance."

"Maybe it is, though," Henry smiled, as he started his horse.

As twilight was deepening to darkness, we entered the little city of Wantos, where we passed the night.

We got under way about eight o'clock. It was two hours or so after midday when we rode into a place of ruins, a place silent and sad, behind which towered the mountains, at this point sheer for the last thousand feet.

The road became a street, and the street took us straight through to the mouth of a tunnel.

"An underground journey!" Henry exclaimed.

"I don't like this," said Morgan.

"I don't either," Henry returned. "There probably is nothing to fear, though. I don't think they have brought us here to make an end of us."

"It looks like it," interposed St. Cloud.

"They would have done that long since," Henry told him. "No—I think we'll be taken to Draconda now, who I hope will be kindly disposed toward us poor wanderers from an alien world."

Here we drew rein before the entrance. Some of the Venusians dismounted and got out metal lamps and jars filled with oil. We asked The Wolf how long this underground journey before us would last, and he answered, by indicating the position of the sun when we would issue, something less than an hour, as near as we could make out.

Out of the tunnel, the height and width of which we saw would permit two mounted persons to go side by side, flowed a little stream of sparkling water. On either side, was a caryatid, a cowled, terrible figure—a representation of Death.

"Good Lord!" exclaimed St. Cloud. "A tomb!"

"Looks like it," Henry nodded. "Queer place, this."

St. Cloud cast his dark look about him in an uneasy manner.

"I wish we had insisted on following that great highway."

"Too late now," Henry told him.

"Is it?" queried the other. "We could retrace our steps."

"Great guns!" Henry exclaimed. "Never! To these people, we are gods or demigods: do you want to destroy all that?"

"I guess you're right," St. Cloud admitted. "But I don't like it."

The Venusians stared in. Requesting with signs (and a magnificent smile) that we follow, Ta Antom touched spurs to his horse.

But we didn't move.

There were twenty armed men waiting to fall in behind us, and we made it plain to The Wolf that we wished these gentlemen to go before.

A slight smile, barely perceptible—which somehow I did not like—touched his mouth. What did Ta Antom have in mind? In that mind, were we even demigods? Henry's argument, I feared, was a weak one, after all. But what could we do? Exercising all caution possible, we must face it out.

Ta Antom waved his hand and spoke a word or two, whereupon the Venusians in question started. The prince swung in behind them, and we followed—Henry and I, each bearing a lamp, bringing up the rear.

When we had gone about an eighth of a mile, we came to two entrances, one on either side, about seven feet high and three in width, sculptured and richly lettered with characters that reminded me of the cuneiform characters of the ancient Mesopotamians and Persians.

"Tombs," said St. Cloud.

About sixty feet further on, we came to two more entrances; another sixty feet, and two more; and so on right along.

They all were about the same size, though some were much more striking than others, what with the nature or the abundance of the sculpturing.

Before one of them, Henry Quainfan suddenly drew rein.

"I'm going in," he said.

He reached his reins to me, dismounted and went in. Beyond the entrance, was a passage twenty feet or so in length, which conducted him into a large chamber. There he disappeared, but we could see the glow of his lamp as he moved about.

A few minutes, and he returned.

"Tomb," he said, taking the reins. "There are dozens of persons in there, men, women and children, all standing up in stone coffins in niches in the walls and as perfect as the day they died. The preservation is wonderful—uncanny. Better go in and look."

But I shook my head.

"These sepulchral surroundings give me the creeps," I told him. "I would like to see—but I won't."

"Ditto," said St. Cloud.

So we proceeded.

"Ancient dead?" I asked.

"I don't know, but I think they are. And I wonder what destroyed that great people, how many years have rolled across this planet since these great cities were made desolate, since this tunnel and these tomb caverns were hewn out of the living rock, how long those dead men and women have been staring and staring in the darkness—for their eyes are open."

I made an exclamation.

"Just so," he said: "there's a glass in each coffin. Some are dust-covered, some wiped clean."

He was silent for a little space.

"And I wonder why this life and death are, Rider. Surely there is some great purpose behind it all, else human beings would not have been placed on both Terra and Venus. But to me all is darkness. I don't know what to think any more."

"And immortality?" I asked.

He shook his head.

"It has been much in my thoughts, but I can't believe that the human soul is immortal. Of course, we are part of something that is immortal, but that does not make us immortal any more than does the fact that the rattlesnake is part of that same something make the rattlesnake immortal.

"What I mean is simply this: matter can not be destroyed; it can be changed, but never destroyed."

"Only assumption!" I said.

"So a man," he went on, as though there had been no interruption, "when he kisses his sweetheart's lips, perhaps is thrilled by matter that was in some slimy and unknown Paleozoic creature, in a hideous dinosaur, an ichthyosaur, a gibbering Pithecanthropus, a bloody cannibal, a hideous snake that lurked in the jungle, or in a slimy thing that lived in the slimy deeps of the sea."

"What a strange, horrible way," I exclaimed, "you have of looking at things!"

"I don't blink," he said. "But—how can a thing that comes from the earth and the radiant energy of the sun be a thing immortal? And why on earth should any creature be immortal? Why should that purple-robed butcher who

would have killed Mynine—how was he so much above this horse I am riding that he should have life everlasting, while this horse goes into the unending darkness of nothing?"

"Tell me," said I, "why the horse goes into the blackness eternal, and I will give answer."

"And yet," he went on, "this question comes: if this life is the *only one*, why were human beings placed on this planet that earth-men call Venus? That we find them on the two orbs proves that the Almighty placed them there, and it logically follows that He had some end in view (to use such inadequate phraseology because we have none better) when He created them Tellurians and Venusians. But what that end is—who can tell us that?

"And now, on the other hand, Rider, this question: why, if this life is *not* the only one, were human beings placed on the two planets—instead of that world into which they will enter when they die? You see, one gets nowhere. The fact that human beings were placed on both Terra and Venus does not go to prove that human beings are immortal, any more than does the fact that horses were placed on the two sister planets go to prove that horses are immortal."

"But you are no longer an aetiologist," I observed.

"No, I am not," he returned; "but I am a poor teleologist."

He looked at me and smiled curiously.

"I have seen that there is a purpose after all," he added, "or I think I have seen; but all is darkness."

He waved a hand despairingly.

"Oh, how infinitesimal is that which we poor humans can see and understand!" I said. " 'Lo, these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?' When we seek, unaided by the teachings of the Almighty, to see the why and the wisdom of things, we are soon in darkness. 'He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing.' We don't know why, or why He fills the worlds with life, human and beastly; but I can only believe that it is for some glorious purpose—perhaps to be revealed to us in the end."

"It may be so," he mused; "but I wish I could catch at least adumbrations of that purpose."

Here silence fell.

A few minutes later, the Venusians came to a stop.

"Look at that!" said Henry as we drew rein. "It's different."

We were near an entrance that, unlike any of the others, had a door, a ponderous door of granite. This door was about eight feet in height, in width four or over. Near the top, were two openings, perhaps six by eighteen inches. In thickness, it was all of a foot.

Ta Antom dismounted and signed for one of the lamp-bearers to do likewise. Then he put a hand to the door and pressed lightly; that great stone swung in almost as easily as a house-door on its hinges.

"What a piece of work!" Henry exclaimed. "Did you ever see anything like it? I thought that such things were to be found only in romance."

"Wonder if he expects us to go in there."

Thus I voiced my apprehension.

"Looks like it," said Henry.

"Something interesting in here," The Wolf told us—with signs, of course.

He seemed to take it for granted that we would enter.

"Wonder what's the idea," said Henry.

"Trap," Morgan said.

"I hardly think so," Henry returned. "He would not have had to bring us here for that. All the same we'll keep an eye on the fellow."

He dismounted; I followed suit. St. Cloud sat hesitant. Mynine looked scared.

"I tell you," said Morgan, "I don't like this business. There may be treachery lurking about in this darkness. Heaven knows, these tombs are a good place for it."

"Well, if it is here ,treachery will come—wether we go in or whether we don't," Henry said. "Keep rifle or revolver ready for instant action."

St. Cloud muttered something, swung to the ground and helped his fair companion to dismount, who promptly placed herself at Henry's side.

"Bet they entomb us," said Morgan.

"If we keep an eye on this gentleman," Henry returned, "they can't do that without entombing him too."

"Why did he pass all the others," demanded St. Cloud, "and choose this one—which has a door—if he isn't up to something?"

"It does look suspicious," I put in.

"As I said," Henry told us, "if they harbor treachery, it will come—no matter what we do."

"But that," returned St. Cloud, "is no reason why we should walk right into a trap."

"We must be careful," Henry said. "Don't let him get out of your sight for a single instant."

"I won't," muttered St. Cloud. "Since it must be, in we go."

The Wolf was standing in the doorway waiting, the lamp-bearer in the passage beyond. We started in. What fools we were! Mynine clung to Henry's left arm. Morgan brushed past them and followed at the heels of The Wolf. I was in the rear.

Having proceeded through the passage, ten feet or so in length, we found ourselves in a great chamber—about forty feet in width and ten to the ceiling. The silence hung heavy. Objects at the far end were visible, but so faint that we could not make an estimate of the length of the tomb. At the near end, and on either side, ran a stone bench, hewn out of living rock, about two feet high and three in width; and in the walls, leaning back in niches cut in the solid rock, were men, women and children, standing there in their stone coffins with hands folded on their breasts. These bodies were like those in that chamber which Henry had entered—apparently as perfect as the day life quitted them.

I shivered. A little cry burst from Mynine's lips, and she clung more tightly to Henry, who, holding his lamp with his left hand and his Winchester with his right, looked calmly about.

To me it was unutterably awful to look upon these earthly shells of spirits that had lived their earthly life in some remote age of the planet, and which stared at us as if yet tenanted by their departed souls, as if asking by whose leave we had entered this solemn place.

Why had Ta Antom wished us to enter this tomb chamber? I looked about carefully, scrutinizing every spot, but could see nothing that gave hint of lurking danger. It seemed that we were perfectly safe, but the fact that our Venusian had passed all those doorless chambers and chosen this one never left my mind.

We proceeded the length of the room, estimated as one hundred and forty feet; and there, at the end, it happened.

We must have become careless. I happened to look—I know not why—at that saturnine companion of The Wolf, and, the instant my eyes fell upon him, he extinguished his lamp with amazing, lightning-like swiftness. The movement of that stolid-looking being was so swift that the eye could scarcely follow it. I jerked my revolver out of the holster, on which weapon my right hand had been resting; but, ere it was out, almost in that same instant the light was extinguished by the lamp-bearer, The Wolf struck the lamp from Henry's hand in such a way that it, too, was extinguished, and the great chamber of the dead was plunged into blackness, pierced by a sharp scream, filled with

unutterable terror, from the lips of Mynine.

That scream of hers was cut short by the report of my revolver, and we heard the lamp-bearer, who had started toward the entrance go down and groan feebly.

The Wolf was making seemingly with great swiftness, toward the doorway, marked by a dim shaft of light. Again I fired into the darkness, hoping to hit the man by sheer luck, but The Wolf sped on. Then it was, while the thunder of my revolver filled the great room, that Henry's voice cut through the darkness:

"Don't shoot, Rider!"

And I heard him start in pursuit of The Wolf.

I started after him and fell over the wounded Venusian, the Winchester striking the floor with a crash. I came to my knees hurriedly and groped about for the weapon. As I found it, which I did in a second or two, flame leaped from Henry's rifle, and a great roar filled the tomb.

The next instant, that shaft of light vanished, the dull sound made by the closing of the door came to our ears, and then could be seen only those twin strips of light that marked the apertures in that entombing stone.

I stumbled on toward the dim light, in my ears the sounds made by the triumphant Venusians as they made the door fast without.

When I reached the mouth of the passage, they were moving away.

"Henry!" I called softly, my voice sounding strange in that awful place, like a weak and fear-burdened voice heard far away. "Oh, Henry!"

Came a mordant laugh from the tunnel—I think from the lips of The Wolf.

"Here!" came Henry's answer. "And all right. They've fixed us now, Rider."

I went on toward him, my heart pounding fiercely, the blood drumming in my ears.

"Yes—laugh, you hell-hounds!" said Henry to the departing Venusians. "Mock away—you spawn of Seth!"

Came a burst of laughter and cries in answer.

"All the same, Rider,'"he said, "the laugh is on us."

I was beside him now, and, leaning against the rock wall, I stood staring at that dying light struggling in through the apertures in the door and listening to the sounds of the horses' hoofs and the occasional voices and mocking laughter of the men.

The light became weaker and weaker, soon went out altogether: we were in utter blackness, in which it seemed must hover the spirits of those lifeless ones behind us in the great tomb cavern; and ere long the last sound from the triumphant Venusians had died away in the distance.

CHAPTER THIRTY

THE GHOST

ST. CLOUD and Mynine had remained at the end of the room. No doubt it was owing to the Venusian's extreme weakness that one or both of them were not stabbed. The man was biding his time.

The effect this sudden and frightful treachery of The Wolf had upon me was at first something akin to stupefaction, then horror unutterable. In mercy, though, the former lasted for some time after we had returned to Mynine and St. Cloud.

I often have marveled that this was so, have often wondered why it was that indescribable horror soon to fall upon me did not come as I stood there by the door. I knew that we were entombed, but surely we should eventually discover some way of escape. My crushed, numb brain somehow would not admit that there might be none.

"Hey!" came St. Cloud's voice. "Henry—Rider!"

"Coming!" Henry returned. "Try to find one of those lamps."

So we went back to where St. Cloud and the fair Mynine were, and that wounded Venusian, feeling our way along the stone bench in the utter blackness.

As we drew near, we heard Morgan groping about.

"Haven't got a single match," he told us.

"Wonder if that Venusian is dead," said Henry.

"No," came St. Cloud's voice from the darkness.

There was an exclamation.

"Got it," he said.

"Hope none of the oil has run out," said Henry, opening his match-box. "Wish that flash-light hadn't got broken."

He struck a light. Mynine screamed, there was a flash of steel, and a sharp cry of pain rang through the tomb.

The Venusian had launched forward on one hand and with the other driven (and wrenched) a knife deep into Morgan's thigh.

The sudden movement of surprise that Henry gave extinguished the match, and the sepulchral blackness rushed back into the circle whence it had just been driven by the ghostly light, blotting out the faces and forms of my companions and the Venusian on the floor, and the blanched face and the white-robed form of Mynine.

"Cover him, Rider," said Henry, "the moment I strike. If he tries it again, shoot him."

I raised my Winchester in readiness. Henry struck the light. But there was no need to cover Draconda's warrior. He had sunk down as if utterly exhausted; apparently he had taxed his waning strength to the utmost to make the thrust.

I sprang to the side of St. Cloud, who I feared was about to fall. With drawn face and trembling hands, he drew the weapon. A fountain of blood came gushing forth. A savage oath burst from his throat. With all his might, he hurled the knife at the Venusian, but the weapon went wild, clattering its way into darkness along the floor.

Henry caught up the lamp and lighted it. Fortunately, not a drop of oil had escaped. Mynine and I helped St. Cloud to the bench, upon which he sank with a groan. I glanced at the Venusian, who was about fifteen feet from the spot, and saw a ghastly smile on his dark visage. He was near to death, and he must have known it, and yet there he was smiling away in triumph.

After satisfying himself that there was nothing to fear from the man. Henry reached the lamp to Mynine, and he and I began to bandage Morgan's wound, which was bleeding profusely, with the long strip of cloth that the lovely Venusian beside us had torn from her stolalike dress.

When we had done all that we could, the wound was still bleeding, though but slightly. Morgan had lost a deal of blood, and, as he had been somewhat ill for a day or two, I feared that he soon would be in a pretty bad way.

Somehow the fact that we were entombed hovered, as it were, in the background of my mind: the full horror of our situation had not come down upon me.

We had just finished the bandaging, however, when a sharp exclamation burst from St. Cloud—a sound strange and terrible to hear.

"What's the matter?" Henry asked.

Mynine was looking at Morgan with a curious expression in her wondrous eyes.

"Matter?" he ejaculated. "Matter's no name for it! What's the use of this bandaging, anyway? Tell me that! What's the good of anything now?"

He waved his hand in a gesture of awful despair.

"Entombed!" he burst out. "In Heaven's name, don't you know what this means? Buried alive!"

And then it was that the full horror of our situation came crashing down upon me. My heart gave a frightful leap, stood still, then went thumping madly. Things swam before my eyes, and there were streaks of vivid green and scarlet.

Mynine set the lamp down on the bench, and it was as though I saw her through a mist.

Suddenly Morgan's voice shattered the stillness, his words tense and harsh with an overmastering rage.

"You will grin, will you?" he yelled at the Venusian, whose ghastly grin of triumph waxed thereat. "The grin is on us, all right; but your bones will whiten here with ours! No, they'll come and fish you out—you'll be a hero!"

Morgan's right hand had gone to his revolver. The dying man flung forth a few words, which, from the expression that shot across Mynine's face, I knew were anything but a blessing.

St. Cloud jerked his revolver out. As he was raising it, however, Henry stepped in front of him and laid a hand on the weapon.

"That would be murder, Morgan," he said, his fingers closing on the cold steel.

"He helped to murder us!" cried St. Cloud, trying to free the revolver. "And —look at him grin!"

Henry took the weapon from him, gently though in a manner that showed plainly resistance would have been futile.

"The man is dying," he told St. Cloud. "What hurt can his grin do? He is going, and it is only a question of time before we follow. He has served his masters well and can grin at his work—or is it Draconda he has served?"

He spoke without bitterness, his voice quite natural. Mynine kept her lovely eyes on his face, and I saw tears gathering in their blue loveliness.

St. Cloud opened his mouth to speak, changed his mind and sat staring at the Venusian with an expression somewhat vacant.

"I'm going to see if I can find a way of escape," Henry said. "However, I'm not going to voice a hope that I don't entertain; in other words, I don't think there is any chance of our getting out of this place. Ta Antom, I believe, overlooked nothing when he made his plans. Real people in a real position like this, don't find hidden exits and things—as they do in novels and romances."

St. Cloud nor I made any response. We were watching the dying man, whose breathing now was quick and labored. Henry stepped toward him on some errand of mercy, but stopped when a ghastly, horrible grin appeared on the dark lineaments of the Venusian. That grin vanished, the man's head slowly rolled from side to side, there was a convulsive shudder, a long sigh escaped his drawn lips, and his spirit had quitted the flesh.

And mine the hand that had killed him.

"Well," said Henry Quainfan at length, "I'm going to see if I can find a way out of this hole."

He stepped over, picked up the dead man's lamp, from which half the oil had escaped, and, coming back, touched its wick to the flame of the other vessel.

"Only eight matches left," he told us.

St. Cloud nor I had a one!

"The prospect," said I, "is certainly not a bright one."

"No," smiled Henry; "but it might have been worse."

"Bunk!" St. Cloud exclaimed.

And I confess I thought he was about right.

With some facetious remark, Henry turned and walked away to begin his search for a way of escape from this terrible chamber.

He went into the passage and to the door. In a little while, Mynine arose, and, casting a shy glance at us, followed him. As she moved away into the darkness, her white dress gave her the seeming of a ghost.

St. Cloud raised himself up on an elbow and watched her for a space, then suddenly sank back and closed his eyes.

I got out my Bible. As I began to turn the pages of the sacred volume, Morgan opened his eyes.

"Yes—read something, Rider," he said. "I want to hear something from God's Book. I feel that I am very near to Him now, and my life in some ways —I'm afraid, Rider; I'm afraid!"

"Hush," said I. "Hush."

"Read. Read the first thing you come to."

What my eyes lighted upon was the fifty-fifth verse of the fifteenth chapter of Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians.

"*'O death, where is thy sting?'*" I read. "*'O grave, where is thy victory?'*"

As I started the next verse, St. Cloud interrupted:

"The sting is there, Rider—I can only hope that it has no victory. But go on."

He closed his eyes wearily; I went on reading. He did not interrupt me any more. Now and again the sound of blows struck by Henry rolled round the tomb. And, as I read from the pages of the wonderful volume—and, indeed, was it owing solely to Chance that it was there in my hands?—but, as I read, strength came to me, strength to meet this horrible death that even now was watching.

At last I became aware that St. Cloud was breathing heavily; glancing at the pale face, I found him asleep.

Then I read to myself, and I prayed.

After a time, Henry and Mynine returned—and they came hand in hand. At first I was surprised, for I knew that Henry did not love the girl. Much had I marveled that she had not seen this. But, then, Love is blind—though that does not prevent the seeing of mirages most wondrous and strange.

I gave Henry an inquiring look, and he returned a look that was guilty and defiant.

And then of a sudden I saw why he had done this thing:

Death was certain; he would fill the girl's last hours with that happiness which he knew would be concomitant to the belief that she was loved.

And, judging from that rapt, yes, angelic look on her face, Mynine was happy now—even though she and the man she loved were entombed.

"No way of escape?" I asked, knowing full well that he had discovered none.

He shook his head; there was a short silence.

"No—at least, I didn't find any. I suppose we should examine every inch of the place, though."

"What would be the use?" I asked. "This is the end."

"I believe it is," he said soberly. "Phantasms of hope would avail us nothing here. Still, a fellow might as well be looking about the place as twiddling his thumbs."

"That treacherous Ta Antom!" I exclaimed. "Be sure, he knew what he was about!"

"He did. That's a wonderful door, Rider."

"I should say it is!"

He smiled a little.

"Oh, Morgan's asleep," he observed.

He and the girl moved past me and stood looking down on St. Cloud.

"Poor fellow!" Henry murmured and turned away.

"Come, Rider," he added, "let's make a thorough examination of this prison of ours."

Taking up the lamp, I arose, and we began our scrutiny of this dungeon of Erebus. But our examination, as systematic as it was minute, showed us

nothing but the black hopelessness of our plight.

So we came back in silence and despair.

Morgan was still sleeping.

"I'll put out this light," Henry said, "for we mustn't waste any of the oil. And the wick in this other lamp can be lowered. Economy's the word now. When the oil is gone—darkness then, blackness unending."

So he extinguished his lamp, then took seat on the bench, where he instantly was joined by Mynine, and proceeded to lower the wick in the other vessel.

Of a verity, the stoutest heart that ever beat in human breast might well be appalled by this doom that impended.

The deep silence of the place closed in upon us. No words of mine could convey an adequate idea of that awful stillness—in which the ticking of our watches was like the clanging of gongs.

That scene often rises before my eyes: the coffins behind us; Morgan stretched out on the stone bench, lost in his troubled slumber; Henry and Mynine, his arm about the girl's shoulders, over which her golden hair fell in masses, her cheek pressed against his; and myself, brooding there with my face buried in my hands—the feeble illumination giving it all a weirdness that reminds me most forcibly of a terrible picture by Dore.

Minutes passed—hours.

Suddenly a scream filled the place—a sound so horrible that it brought me to my feet with a cry on my lips.

"Blanche! Blanche!"

St. Cloud was sitting up—staring down the room in the extremity of terror.

"Look!" he cried, pointing.

We looked, but nothing was there in the darkness.

"She's coming—her *ghost!*" he screamed.

We could do nothing. And slowly the ghost of Blanche came toward him out of the darkness. He thrust out his hands and screamed for us to keep her away.

"Don't laugh like that!" he implored, in a voice that sent shivers through me. "Why do you come to me thus as I die? I said things that weren't true! But—oh—oh!"

His eyes went shut, and he sank back in Henry's arms, merciful unconsciousness blotting out that ghost which had walked out of the sepulchral blackness and laughed at him.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE CRY IN THE DARKNESS

AT length Henry Quainfan resumed his seat.

"I don't know what it's about," he said, "but, if this Blanche knew—"

His look completed the thought.

"Maybe she does know."

His expression was incredulous.

"Do you believe *that?*"

"Oh, I don't say I believe it. Still—"

"Still—?" he queried.

"Who can say?"

"She would have to be dead, a ghost in truth. And how on earth could she get here?"

"If it was as easy to answer as it is to ask," I returned, "ultimate knowledge would have been man's long ago. A question as germane is: how did she, and every other human being, get to the earth, and whence? Tell me that, and I'll try to give you the answer to the other. *We* came here—and in the flesh."

"No," he smiled: "in the *Hornet.*"

"And, when man, in his prison of the flesh, can do that, who can even imagine what powers are his when in the spirit?"

"It may strike you as paradoxical, Rider, and I say it in all humility of spirit, but only scientists can *imagine* that."

"Heaven save us from your scientists when it comes to things spiritual! With all their protoplasms and polysyllabic isms, what do they know about life save that it is something that lives? Whence came it? Spontaneous combustion—I mean, generation! Brought to the primordial earth in the icy heart of a fiery meteorite, suggests Lord Kelvin. Its seeds were, and are, driven through the abysms of space by the agency of radiation-pressure, Arrhenius tells us.

"I admit that the imagination is there, all right! And just remember the other wild fancies that scientists have given us.

"For instance:

"The surface of the sun is cold, that vast globe inhabited, according to the elder Herschel—while, according to Herschel the younger, fiery fishes go sporting about in the flaming solar ocean:*

"Your scientists should know what is in their own house before telling us what we shall, or shall not, find in the many mansions of the spirit."

"Spiritedly put," said Henry Quainfan. "But it amounts to simply this: 'Most that he knows I see, and all that he sees I know.'"

"After all," I said, "why talk about it—now?"

"I should think this the time of all times. Remember Socrates and the hemlock: shall a pagan show more fortitude than a follower of the Christ?"

Whether this was said with a fortifying purpose, or was only words of the moment, I do not know; but I doubt if he could have uttered anything that could more forcibly have produced that very effect.

We should see!

All the same my heart shuddered and sank.

There was silence for a little while.

"You know," I said, "things come crowding into my mind—visions, memories, words spoken or written, some long forgotten. Among the words penned, induced no doubt by what has just been said, this haunting sentence of Poe's:

"'No thinking being lives who, at some luminous point of his life of thought, has not felt himself lost amid the surges of futile efforts at understanding or believing, that any thing exists *greater than his own soul.*'"

"So you waded through *Eureka?* What did you get out of it?"

"Not much: that and a few others. This, for instance:

"'We walk about, amid the destines of our world-existence, encompassed by dim and ever present *Memories* of a Destiny more vast.'"

"Memories," echoed Henry Quainfan. "Long ago, when I told you of my dream woman, I spoke of memories."

"I remember. But you did not regard them as such."

"No, they just seemed so—whispering there was something in my brain that could never die, imprisoned there for a little span of years; something that remembered back to the gardens of Paradise and looked forward to a world as glorious as that of the dimly-remembered past."

I stared at him.

"That from a cold-blooded scientist!"

He smiled.

"Not cold-blooded. Only the intellect was cold—a cliff against which the waves of fancy beat in vain. The heart—how could I tell you that, Rider? of its sweet, foolish longings, the poignant ecstasy of dreams not of earth?"

"You have told me. And after all it is the heart, not the brain, that is the spirit's habitation."

"I understand, then," he said, "why so many people are heartless."

I said nothing to that.

**In a letter to Nasmyth, Sir Jon Herschel wrote with respect to the famous "willow-leaves" of the sun:*

"What can they be? Are they huge phosphorized fishes?"—R. F.

"To show," he went on, "what utter moonshine these so-called soul memories are, since I have heard the name of Draconda—"

"Well?" I queried, wondering at his pause and the way he was looking at me.

"I have at times heard the name come echoing back from those memories of mine."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed.

"Now who doubts?" he smiled.

"Well," said I, "if we get out of this, you will probably—"

"Wouldn't I be up against it!"

"I thought of that. But you needn't lose any sleep on that account."

"No. Ta Antom, of course, merely carried out Draconda's wishes, and this is the end—in the silence and blackness of a tomb."

"Not so," said I, "but the beginning of an adventure more wonderful than the one whose end draws near."

He made no response.

Again that awful stillness closed in upon the place.

And somehow the terrible hours crawled past.

"Rider," said Henry at length, "I'm going to sleep."

"Sweet dreams," I returned. "For my part, though, sleep is simply out of the question."

He looked at his chronometer.

"Midnight," he said.

He smiled, though a little wanly.

"Bedtime, Rider."

He lay down and in a few minutes was sound asleep. How I envied him! Mynine sat watching the sleeper, a white hand resting on his hair, on her face the most beautiful look of abandonment and love that I had ever seen in all my life. Never once did she look in my direction. It was a beautiful but pathetic sight—nay, the circumstances considered, a terrible one. Ere long she pillowed his head in her lap, leaning against the coffin behind her. Our eyes met; the girl blushed furiously. I sighed to myself; this wondrous creature's unrequited love was poignantly touching.

The light grew dimmer. I took the lamp which the dead Venusian had carried and poured its precious contents into the lighted one. When the flame sank again—darkness then, the utter blackness of death.

To my profound thankfulness, Morgan slept on. How I wished that slumber was mine! Then I could forget, or would I know even in my dreams? What wishes and thoughts Mynine had, I can only guess. There she sat, moveless, lovely and loving, with Henry's head in her lap.

At last, yielding to dire necessity, I extinguished the light.

A long time passed, how long I had no idea. I believe, too, that I dozed off; but, if so, it was only into the borderland of sleep. But this I do know: suddenly a cry came drifting into the place, faint and far—piercing to my heart like a sword of ice.

The movement made by the startled Mynine was strangely loud; from her lips broke a low though sharp exclamation:

"Oh!"

It must have been that sudden movement of hers which awakened Henry. I am sure the cry did not, and I do not think it was her exclamation.

He was wide awake in an instant; I could hear him raising himself up.

"Rider!" he said.

"Here I am."

"What's the matter? The girl is trembling terribly. What is it?"

"I don't know," was my stupid reply.

"Hear something?"

Before I could answer, that cry, faint and far, came drifting again through the darkness.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

DRACONDA

WHEN The Wolf issued from the tunnel, elated by the success of his diabolical scheme, he left his company to follow at its leisure and with a single companion started with swiftness for Loom, with what he thought would be good tidings for the queen.

But, thank Heaven, Ta Antom was mistaken! The queen was greatly displeased—nay, was very angry.

It was about one hour before twelve when he reached the palace of Conderogan. There was a ball in the palace this night; on The Wolf's entering the great room, the dancing ceased directly. His coming was unexpected, and everybody naturally was surprised and eager to learn what the prince had to tell.

Going directly to her, he told Draconda what he had done. To his surprise, however, the queen, instead of commending his course of action, in anger interrupted his succinct account of the entombing of the men from the stars.

"I gave word," said Draconda, "that every honor was to be accorded these strange and mighty strangermen—and thus have you honored them; thus have you followed my wishes! How could I have honored them more than by asking you to be my envoy? Who knows what these men are? and whence they come? and what message they bring? You thought you were doing well to entomb these men, but, indeed, it was not so. The evil you have done must be undone—the men brought to me, as I said."

And thereat Queen Draconda gave word that a score of men, under a captain of her body-guard, go swiftly to the tombs, unprison us and see that we reached the palace of Conderogan safe and sound.

A ripple of surprise swept the room—and Draconda knew that her course would be rigorously condemned by the priesthood.

The little cavalcade set out immediately and reached the mouth of the tunnel at something like seven o'clock.

"By Heaven, Rider!" exclaimed Henry Quainfan.

"Yes?"

"They're coming to save us! Hear that?"

"Sounds like it!"

It seemed too good to be true; I found myself wondering if it wasn't a dream.

Ah, there were the sounds of the horses' hoofs on the rock floor. They grew distinct, loud and louder. There, a faint light—oh, so faint—came struggling in through the openings in the door. A few moments, and the Venusians were at the entrance.

Followed a short silence, broken by a peace-call, which Henry answered.

He struck a match and lighted the lamp. Mynine placed herself at his side, and we stood waiting.

The door swung open. For a moment the Venusians hesitated, then the commander boldly entered, followed by several of his men, and came on toward us, making peace-signs.

He was armed with a sword, the hilt flashing with jewels, his men with swords and long-handled spears. When within four or five yards, the captain halted, and he and his followers made obeisance. We bowed slightly in return; that is, Henry and myself—Mynine, a curious look in her eyes, standing moveless, her lovely and slender form drawn to its full and stately height.

As the captain prepared to say something in sign-language, a great voice thundered round the rocky walls. There was Morgan sitting up, his eyes fixed on the captain. Thus came the voice, making the Shakespearian quotation an interrogatory one:

" 'Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damned,
Bring with thee airs from heaven, or blasts from hell,
Be thy intents wicked, or charitable?'

"Give answer, and quickly too, or I'll hurl you across the dreary steppes of Tartary and bang your cocoa against the cedars of Lebanon!"

I went to St. Cloud at the beginning of this outburst, but I could not make him be still. One wild hallucination came swift at the heels of another. Imprecation after imprecation was hurled at the Venusians, come to save us from one of the most horrible deaths that a human being can die.

However, the captain, by making signs and speaking the queen's name, with difficulty, what with St. Cloud's gibberish, acquainted us with the purpose of his coming.

"May Heaven bless Draconda!" said Henry Quainfan.

Of course, St. Cloud could not ride. The Venusians made a stretcher for him, using two spears and as many saddle-blankets for that purpose, and all the while they worked at it, his gibberish and imprecations rained upon them.

When it was done, he vigorously protested against being placed on the stretcher, maintaining that the Venusians were goblins damned, emissaries of Mephistopheles, and goodness only knows what else, and that they intended throwing him into the Phlegethon, which, he declared, was not far distant.

At last, however, we prevailed upon him to lie still, and then we emerged from that dreadful place.

Fifteen minutes or so later, we were in the sunshine, having passed through the mountain.

For a space, with indescribable feelings, I sat looking back into the dark mouth of that tunnel. Then Mynine and I dismounted (Henry had walked beside St. Cloud), and we all, except poor Morgan, who would not touch a bite, ate breakfast—brought from a small town several miles distant by two of the captain's men, who, as he rode through on his way to the tombs, had been left there for that purpose. A thoughtful captain was he, and his name, by the way, was Sotom.

We were in a canyon about a mile wide at this point and probably a thousand feet deep. On every hand was beautiful forests, like that of the earth's tropics. Songs of birds and the drone of insects filled the air—a sharp contrast to that awful silence of the tomb. Everywhere were lovely flowers; strange insects, swift and iridescent, came and went; and great gorgeous butterflies, the like of which no man on earth ever saw, flitted hither and yon in the bright morning sunlight and the somber deeps of the forest.

Near the mouth of the tunnel were ten or twelve ruined buildings. They were very large, their walls and columns rising in massive and somber majesty, and Henry and I thought they had been used for some funeral purpose, in that far-gone time when those Venusians there in the mountain blackness lived and died. How many men and how many years had it taken to hew those great tomb chambers out of the living mountain rock? And what had destroyed that mighty ancient race, which had left monuments before which those of the ancient Tellurians sink almost into insignificance?

Ruins, ruins—everywhere were ruins. Scattered about this land were the skeletons of mighty cities, cities in which thousands upon thousands of men and women had lived and loved, taken and given in marriage, cities which had, certainly, rung with cheers for soldiers returning in triumph, with spoils and captives—and, perhaps, filled with cries of slaughtering invaders and all the manifold horrors of war.

In some of the ruins, dwelt barbarians (were they and these others descendants of that mighty people of old?) and, in others, the lion and the pard wandered unmolested of men. In that antiquity, what strange scenes had occurred at this place where we three Terrestrials now were? How many funeral processions had gone into that tunnel, how many the weeping men, women and children?

Well, they all were gone now, and long had they been gone; and, under that sky of theirs, the cosmic drama and mystery went on—and what was it all about?

As soon as breakfast—an excellent one—was finished, we went on, Henry walking beside St. Cloud, who thought himself the Inca Atahuallpa, borne along in a gorgeous sedan on the shoulders of Peruvian nobles to the city of Caxamalca to see Pizarro; and, in about an hour and a half, we entered that town I mentioned—not Caxamalca, by the way.

There a physician (he was a priest also) came, and he and Henry dressed Morgan's wound. The doctor would have given St. Cloud some medicine, but Henry, to the medico's chagrin, would not permit that, for he feared treachery.

I expressed the opinion that the man would not dare give St. Cloud anything nocuous, since Draconda had saved us from death; but Henry said he wouldn't take any chances.

"If he wanted to administer poison," I remarked, "he could put it into our food or drink."

"True," Henry returned; "but this is more tempting."

Presently Æsculapius quitted the room.

"Sleepy, Rider?" Henry queried.

"Rather."

"Then pound your ear. I'm going to follow suit."

"How about a guard?"

"There's Draconda's guard at the doors. I think we can risk it."

So I lay down, and (I almost said to my surprise) soon had sunk to sleep—if that dream-horror in which I found myself can be called sleep.

One dream was very strange—will haunt me to my dying hour.

Suddenly a white-robed veiled woman appeared before me in that sylvan gloom in which I was wandering. I was all alone. Where the woman came from, I could not tell. She seemed to take form in the air, but I was not sure: she appeared so suddenly. Throwing her veiled head forward, she raised a long cloth-swathed finger and said in measured and cavernous tones:

"I have come to warn you, O man! And take good heed, for I shall not repeat my words. And ask not who I am, but heed my warning and fly. You would not know if I told you. Turn back, O man, and never set foot in Loom—never let your eyes fall on Draconda. Flee—flee—flee, I say; for, if you meet this queen, then from that hour shall you be a man accursed!"

Then she vanished, as suddenly as she had come, and I awoke shuddering, to see that it was night and Henry in the light of the single burning lamp bending over St. Cloud, who was saying something that I could not catch, and to hear the soft tread of the sentry without, keeping watch over Mynine's door and ours.

For some time, I could not go to sleep, these words echoing and reechoing through the gloomy corridors of my brain:

"Flee—flee—flee, I say; for, if you meet this queen, then from that hour shall you be a man accursed."

When I came out of that dream-horror again, the dawn was blushing. St. Cloud was awake and happily in his right mind. He was in a poor way indeed, but Henry and I decided to proceed to Loom. The captain had secured a fine litter, and Morgan, we thought, would be comfortable during the journey to Draconda. However, had we not been so near to Loom, so near the end of our long and strange journey, and so anxious to learn what was in store for us, we would not have proceeded but would have waited till St. Cloud had somewhat recovered.

Shortly after the start, I told Henry about that dream of mine. Now, I did not believe in dreams, and I do not now;

but somehow I could not keep that confounded thing out of my head.

"Funny," said Henry: "I, too, had a dream—one as strange as yours."

There was a short silence. His head was bowed in thought. Mynine was looking at him curiously, a troubled look, I thought, in her lovely eyes.

"Like mine—or pleasant?" I queried.

He did not answer for a space.

"No—not like yours, Rider: it hovers in my mind like a sweet memory that hurts."

I wished that he would go on, but he did not speak, and for a long time we rode in silence.

We traveled down the canyon for two hours or so, at the end of which time, we came to the great road again, which, descending the western wall, ran across the canyon floor and zigzagged its way up the eastern side. In a little while, we had climbed this latter, which is not very high at this place, and were riding through a level country. Everywhere were farmhouses and fields, and here and there little groups of Venusians waiting to see us pass.

At length the road began to ascend a low and rugged range of hills—perhaps mountains would be the better word, for the outstanding heights rose to an altitude of probably three thousand feet. It was about three hours after midday when, on turning a sharp bend in a rugged defile, we came suddenly in view of the valley of Loom, and an exclamation of delight burst from my lips as the beautiful sight met my eyes.

We drew rein and gazed at the panorama spread out before us. Just below, clothing the steep sides of the range and a little of the valley, was noble forest—conserved by royal edict. Beyond were cultivated fields, diversified here and there with clumps of trees. Eight miles or so away lay a large lake, looking, as Henry said, like a piece of fallen sky. We could not see the southern extremity of this beautiful sheet of water, but, as we afterwards learned the lake is about forty miles long. Its width averages about ten miles, and its name is Uava. To the northeast, the lake swept in a beautiful and even curve, and here was the city of Loom, and beyond it the ruins of ancient Loom.

The sky was almost cloudless, the air clear, there being no haziness at all, and so everything stood out distinct.

Floating on the placid surface of the Uava and separated from the modern Loom by a little piece of water, was an island. It was not large, and upon it was a great building, the queen's palace, the palace of Conderogan.

Beyond the lake, the country rose gently to the ramparts of rugged mountains; far in th east, faint and lovely as the cliffs of Paradise, rose the outstanding peaks of that awful cordillera.

Mynine pointed out that island resting on the untroubled breast of the Uava and said:

"Draconda. Leenam Draconda."

So that was Draconda's home, the home of the woman who had saved our lives! I stared at that island—wondering what awaited us three Terrestrials and the fair Mynine there.

"If certain Terrestrials could only see us now, Rider!" Henry Quainfan exclaimed with boyish enthusiasm, taking the glasses from his eyes. "If certain of those omnipercipient ginks could only see us now!"

"Wouldn't they stare!"

"No: they would proceed to tell us how it should have been done."

There ensued a short silence, which he broke, speaking in a changed voice:

"What awaits us down there, Rider? At last we come to the end of our journey—but is it the end? What is this Draconda like? She saved our lives—but what will she do with them in the end?"

"Any more questions?" I queried.

"A thousand; but I won't ask any more. And that dream woman of mine—somehow, I can't keep that dream out of my head."

"The dream—or the woman?"

"Both."

He smiled a little.

"Moonshine, Rider—moonshine."

He turned his eyes to the island of Conderogan, seemingly lost in a reverie; and I saw Mynine give him a troubled look under her long lashes.

I wondered if she feared that her queen would take her lover from her. I felt inexpressibly sorry for this lovely creature and wondered what the denouement of this affair would be like, knowing that partly civilized men and women can not control themselves in erotic disaster as can their civilized brothers and sisters. Is this because, as civilization advances, love becomes more and more a matter of head than heart?

Also, I could not help thinking much of that vague something which had made Henry say, on the night we met her, that Mynine would make a terrible enemy. Now, love disaster for Mynine was, judging from the present aspect of things, which I was pretty sure would not change—love disaster for this girl was inevitable. When it came, would she become an enemy to Henry Quainfan? Would all her wondrous love, when she learned that he did not love her in return, metamorphose itself into a frightful hate? Would this happen, or would she take the blow, which I knew would be a terrible one indeed, quietly and endure her bitterness of heart as a sensible girl should?

These questions, and many others, came; but, it is needless to say, there came no answer.

Just before we started on, St. Cloud said wearily, gazing away at the island of Conderogan, on which we had told him was Draconda's home:

"I'll be glad when we are there. Then I can rest."

Poor St. Cloud: Ere long he was there on the island of Conderogan, and, in the palace of Conderogan, Death was waiting for him—waiting in a guise which, since time began, he had never worn before, in which, I believe, he will never be seen again.

We went on: about an hour afterwards, St. Cloud fell asleep.

The sun was setting when we entered the great city of Loom. The streets were crowded. We were much struck by the quietude that reigned in the vast crowds assembled to see us pass, the men from the stars, and by the great number of women who— to use Henry's phrase—had "pharmaceutical complexions."

We rode to the landing-place just opposite the island of Conderogan, where we dismounted.

Twilight had now fallen, and the island, whose sides rose straight up from the glassy surface of the water to the height of fifty feet or more, and the great palace upon it, in spite of the light that shone from the latter's windows, loomed up dark and ominous-looking in the fading light.

A barge was waiting at the landing-place, and in a few minutes we were on the island of Conderogan, which was, I thought, near a thousand feet from the place where we had embarked.

Broad steps, broken halfway up by a resting-place, conducted us to the brow of the island, where we passed two guards. We crossed a beautiful courtyard, ascended a short flight of steps and entered the palace, passing two more guards at the entrance.

We were now met by a high functionary of some sort, who gave Henry and myself each a magnificent bow and Mynine a look that was hard and curious. Then he said something to the captain, whereupon, instead of proceeding through the large passage before us, our guides turned short to the left and conducted us through several passages to a set of rooms.

These rooms looked out upon the lake and were sumptuously furnished. Arabesque curtains hung at the doorways and the windows—the latter had glass—and the carpet was the loveliest I had ever set eyes on. Here were men-

servants and womenservants to wait upon us. Captain Sotom and Mr. High Functionary soon bowed themselves out—going, we thought, to Draconda.

Morgan was still sleeping, though not quietly. Now and again he groaned or talked. Knowing that sleep is the best thing in the world for a sick person, we did not move him from the litter, lest he might be awakened.

In ten or fifteen minutes, Captain Sotom returned with the information that Draconda wished to see us.

Accordingly, leaving our sleeping comrade, though not without misgivings, in the care of Draconda's servants, we—Henry, Mynine and myself—followed Sotom, we two Terrestrials carrying our Winchesters.

As we were leaving, St. Cloud cried out in tones of horror:

"Blanche! Blanche! Good God—you here!"

Mynine clung to Henry's left arm and evidently was very much frightened, and I confess that my heart was hitting on every cylinder.

What was this woman in whose presence we soon were to stand?

At length we were approaching an arched doorway, the curtains of which were slowly drawn aside by unseen hands. Just within the entrance, were two guards, who, as we drew near, raised their halberds (and vicious-looking weapons they were) in salute. Passing through, we found ourselves in a great hall, pretty well filled with people and flooded with soft light, sparkling from thousands of jewels.

Our ingress was from the left and near one end. At the other end of the great vaulted place, about one hundred and twenty-five feet away, was a dais, covered with red carpet; upon this dais, was a throne—and there sat Draconda!

Up toward the throne, we proceeded. All eyes in the room were upon us, except the queen's. I felt inexpressibly uncomfortable; Henry, however, appeared to be untroubled by the gaze of the many Venusians.

Near Draconda was our old friend Ta Antom. The queen was talking with an old man and examining what I took to be a sheet of paper; but the old Venusian evidently was more interested in us than in the talk of his queen—whose indifference, I thought, surely was assumed.

On we went, Draconda continuing her examination of the sheet.

And of a sudden, when we were very near, something shot through me that was like a pang. I was suddenly aware of a beauty that was so beautiful that it hurt.

Her head was turned a little to one side, and the thought of looking into her eyes sent the blood wildly coursing through my veins.

We stopped, Mynine falling on her knees before her dread queen, though I am sure that Henry would not have permitted this if he had not become oblivious to the very existence of Mynine.

Slowly Draconda raised her eyes, raised them until they looked straight into mine.

Then it was that I got the full force of her matchless beauty. Her beauty surged against me, wave upon wave, beauty such as I had never dreamed could be possessed by one of the earth, earthy. And yet, had I then and there been snatched out of her presence and asked to describe it, I could not have even told whether she was a blonde or a brunette.

For an instant only did her eyes look into mine. Over my whole person they leaped, resting for a moment on the rifle, and I saw a look of unutterable amazement rush into those glorious orbs, which of a sudden went to Henry Quainfan.

They widened, one hand clutched at the arm of her chair, the other closed on the sheet, sending a thousand wrinkles through it, and I saw her breast rise with a quick intake of breath and a pallor dash the blood from her face.

She sank back in the chair and stared at him.

Utter silence reigned.

She looked from one to the other of us, unutterable astoundment on every lovely lineament.

Inexpressibly amazed I was at her awful beauty—awful is the only adjective that really describes it—but soon this was not the only thing there was to be amazed at.

For slowly she came to her feet, slowly she rose to her full and imperial height, and, with one hand on the arm of the chair and the other, the left, pressed against her cheek, she said in a voice that was as soft and sweet as the soft music of falling waters:

"You—you are Tellurians? You are Americans?"

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE MYSTERY

I LOOKED at Henry Quainfan—to see a slight pallor on his sunburned face. The silence hung heavy. I waited for him to break it. His lips moved as though he were going to speak, but no sound issued from them.

It was Draconda's English, I thought, that had struck him speechless. had brought that pallor to his cheeks; but, as I was soon to learn, this was not so.

I turned my look back to the queen and waited a moment, thinking she might speak again, but she, too, remained silent.

Then I spoke, my voice shaking a little, and this is what I said:

"How on earth, O Queen, did you come to this place?"

A beautiful light leaped into her eyes; she clapped her hands like a little girl.

"I was right, I was right!" she cried. "And yet it may not be: you are Americans, aren't you?"

"Americans," I told her. "But, in Heaven's name, how did you come from the earth to this world called Venus? We never dreamed that any one had made that journey before us."

She looked at me curiously, her brows contracting slightly; when she spoke, it was not to give answer to my question.

"Of course, I knew that you were Tellurians, but I was not sure that Americans stood before me."

That voice so sweet and silvery—of such have poets dreamed.

"But, O Draconda," I asked again, "how did you come to this planet?"

She gave me a puzzling smile.

"Why do you think I did?"

"Great Heaven!" I exclaimed.

She laughed a little.

"You think I am fooling—but how did *you* cross that awful abyss between Terra and the Planet of Love? Never had I dreamed such a thing possible."

I stared.

Here was a thing to puzzle and amaze: never had she dreamed it possible to make that terrible intermundane journey, and yet here *she* was! Why had she not given me answer? Why did our wondrous and mysterious Draconda utter such foolishness?

"Yes," she said, "how came you from Terra to this world that earth-men call Venus?"

"As you came, I fancy, O Draconda: in a—in a thing."

"A thing? I never saw a *thing* that could journey through the interplanetary deeps!"

"Well, O Queen, such it was that brought us here. Only Heaven knows what made it come, Heaven and my comrade," indicating Henry: "he made it."

"So," said Draconda, looking at Henry Quainfan I thought a little shyly. "And some disaster occurred, else you would not have come journeying down the river on a raft. Was it not so?"

Henry made no response—just stood there like a dummy. It was patent, too, that Draconda was agitated not a little.

"Yes, O Queen," I made answer. "After bringing us through all those millions of miles of void, the thing—it was called the *Hornet*—was destroyed by a celestial wanderer, a huge meteorite.

Not a vestige of the *Hornet* remained. Then we made the raft and came down the river; and I suppose all that has occurred since our arrival in your land is known to you."

Draconda nodded.

"Couriers came daily, keeping me informed of everything. And well did you three fight at that temple. It is a wonder that you were not killed, for you had committed one of the most horrible crimes it is possible to commit here. Yes, it is indeed a marvel that you are here before me, and I shall say, though perhaps I should not, that there is not yet an end to the matter—though," she added a little quickly, "no harm will befall you if aught in my power can prevent it."

Her look went to Mynine.

"And this," said she, "is the girl you saved from the sacrificial knife?"

"This is she," I said.

Here Henry stooped and raised Mynine to her feet.

"Yes," said Draconda, giving Mynine a look that I did not like, "it were not well that she kneel. Forgive me," addressing Henry Quainfan; "forgive me my forgetfulness."

Again she gave Mynine that icy look.

"It seems," she observed, her eyes looking straight into Henry's, "that it is indeed the Planet of Love."

He stood silent. Forsooth, what could he have said to that?

"And your companion—is his condition serious?" Draconda asked after a short and somewhat awkward pause, addressing the words to me.

"He is indeed very ill," I made answer, "and sorely wounded. However, I do not think that he is in any imminent danger. The worst, I think, is over. He is sleeping now."

"I shall visit him," she said, "this night if he awakes; if not, tomorrow. By the way, what is your name?"

"Farnermain, Rider Farnermain, O Queen."

"Rider Farnermain," she repeated, with an inclination of the head.

Her look went to Henry Quainfan.

"And yours? Why do you stand so silent? You have not spoken once."

I thought there was a tremulous note in her voice as she spoke these words, but of that I was not sure.

"His name is Quainfan," I interposed, "Henry Quainfan. O Queen, he is dumb."

"Dumb!" exclaimed Draconda.

"Alas, 'tis so. Does he not look like a dummy?"

"It was the surprise, amazement, astoundment, O Draconda," he said.

She looked at me with inquiring eyes.

"He made me do all the talking, O Queen," I explained.

Draconda laughed musically and descended from the dais with a grace and imperial bearing that would have shamed the proudest woman on Terra.

"I can imagine how astonished you were," she said, advancing to Henry Quainfan with outstretched hands, "to hear English on the lips of a Cytherean. I am inexpressibly happy to meet you, Mr. Quainfan."

And she shook both his hands. Henry stammered something in reply, I don't know what. I never had seen any woman faze him at all, and here he was flurried indeed!

"Of course, you know my name," she said. "And please do not call me Queen. I like Draconda better—just Draconda."

"Miss Draconda?" Henry asked. "Or —or Mrs?"

Observe, he was recovering.

"Miss," she answered, unable to repress the coquettish smile that crept about her dimpled mouth. "But do not call me Miss, please—just Draconda, O Quainfan."

Then the queen advanced to me with outstretched hands. As her fingers touched mine, my senses swayed and reeled in wild ecstasy, leaving me faint and atremble. Perhaps you will remember that I had doubted there was such a thing as love at first sight: and now I loved this Draconda, had loved her from that moment her eyes first looked into mine. Yes, I loved her, this woman so unutterably beautiful, beautiful as I had never dreamed a woman could be.

She was a brunette. Her hair, upon which rested a glittering ampyx richly studded with diamonds, was of raven blackness, the rich tresses having a tendency to beautiful curls and tangles; her eyes too were black, her complexion olive —eyes in which, it seemed to me, something cosmic slumbered and stirred, something that reminded me of the mystery of space and the Milky Way, of the twinkling of stars and the flaming of nebulae.

She wore no gems save those in the ampyx, one of which was a great red diamond—though I took it to be a ruby. Her dress was of a delicious cream color, cut low at the throat and short of sleeve. On her feet, which now and again peeped out from the silken folds, were sandals with fastenings of jeweled gold. Neither throat, arms nor hands bore ornament of any kind. There was no need to bedeck that matchless body of hers, as instinct with health as with dazzling loveliness.

Her figure was tall and slender and willowy. In her depthless eyes, and on and about her full lips, was a look the like of which I had never seen in all my life. It reminded one of sadness, and yet it was not an expression of sadness. If I were to say that it was one of deep experience, there would come, I believe, an idea of harshness or even cruelty perhaps; but there was neither harshness nor cruelty in the eyes of Draconda. It was, I fancy, an expression very like that in the orbs of Poe's Ligeia: "I have felt it in the ocean—in the falling of a meteor."

But I can not describe it, I simply can not; nor could any other man—even one with all the words of all languages at his command. Nor can I at all describe her terrific, her superhuman loveliness.

"But," I know you will say, "Jack in love is no judge of Jill's beauty."

So be it. But of this I am convinced: love itself could not magnify the loveliness of Draconda.

Her age I put at about twenty-five years, that is, using terrestrial years; employing Venusian years, her age would, of course, be forty.

I have made it plain that Mynine was a wonderfully beautiful woman; but Draconda put her quite into the shade. Of course, the queen had a slight advantage: though careful to protect her beauty from its ravages, Mynine had not come through the intense sunlight untouched, and she was travel-stained, to say nothing of those horrors she had gone through. But, even had she been her very best, Mynine could not have fared with noteworthy gain.

The queen and our charge made a sharp and lovely contrast—Mynine with her white skin, blue eyes, blue as the dome of heaven on a clear day, and her curling golden hair; Draconda with her olive complexion, hair of raven blackness and eyes as dark and lovely and mysterious as the starry deeps of heaven —eyes in which shone the stars of immortality and Paradise, those orbs that will shed their splendor undimmed when the stars are cold.

Suddenly came the memory of Henry Quainfan's dream woman: she, too, had black eyes, raven hair and complexion olive, and her beauty transcended that of the daughters of men.

Was there something in this picture of his, after all? Was this extraordinary being that woman of his dreams? The thought, the fear that 'twas so went to my brain like fire.

But—nonsense, utter nonsense! How could Draconda's picture have been stamped on his brain? Yes, how indeed? It was nonsense; it was worse than nonsense. If she were his dream woman, why had she been born on Venus and he on Terra? But, confound it! she had not been born on Venus—what was the

matter with me? She had been born on Terra—because she spoke English. And yet how could she be a Terrestrial when she had just said it never had occurred to her that a journey from the earth to Venus was possible? And, if she—ye gods, what a mixup!

Why had she not answered my question as to how she had come to this planet? Why had she told that palpable fib? On what idea had she reared that flimsy structure of absurdity?

All these thoughts came with the quickness of the lightning; indeed, they did not come in succession but all at once; and the result was that my brain became muddled—little wonder, forsooth!—and I could not think at all. Indeed, what light could have broken in had it been otherwise?

And, through my muddled brain, and through my veins, coursing like a flaming flood, rushed a frightful jealousy. For, after all, it seemed certain that Draconda was the woman of Henry's dreams—this woman whom I thus so strangely loved. And I hated him. Yes, I did; shame, shame! A few minutes before, I had never seen Draconda; and now I loved her. And my love, as suddenly as it had come, had engendered in my breast this hate for the kindest and truest friend any son of Adam has known.

Why does Love, sacred Love, thus make sinners of men? With no little joy, however, I remember that, even as the insensate hatred ran like fire through my veins, I cursed myself for that weakness which had permitted this monster to enter my heart, to find even momentary lodgment there.

Even now, as I write this, now when all is over and done, I burn with the shame of my weakness and that sin born thereof.

"Let us now leave this room," said Draconda, "for it is not meet that you stand, and you are travel-weary. See, that chair of mine is the only one in the room. Here everyone stands save myself; here even the high priest stands, who, in some ways, is stronger than I. And see how the people are staring! They are amazed—and little wonder—to see me talking thus with the dread men from the stars. And doubtless you are amazed as they."

"More than they can imagine," said Henry Quainfan.

"O Draconda," I said, becoming bold, "it is a mystery for which I can find no key—your statement that it had never occurred to you that the gap between the earth and this planet could be crossed by mortal men."

"Can you cut this Gordian knot, O Farnermain: how did you go to the earth?"

"Which means this: you were born on Venus."

"Of a surety I was—on this very island."

"O Draconda, why do you befool us like this?"

"Like what?" she queried sweetly.

"Pardon me, O Queen, but one born here on Venus, unless a Terrestrial had come, could not know English."

"Could not?" she exclaimed. "How do you know that? But, after all, it is no wonder that you think my words untrue. Have patience, O Farnermain, I pray you. All will be explained—or maybe you will see."

She looked at me whimsically.

"He has keen eyes who sees when he can't see."

"Which means that a lantern will not help a mole."

"My Farnermain," said the queen, laughing and shaking a finger at me, "why put a rope to the eye of the needle?

"However," she went on, "it is no wonder that you think I have said the thing which is not; but it is a fact that I was born on this planet, in this city, in this very palace of Conderogan, and that I never have seen or heard of a Terrestrial here before you. You, my Farnermain, have made the most amazing and mysterious journey ever made by mortal men, and doubtless you have glimpsed deep into the terrible and wondrous arcana of Creation, or 'tis like you would not be near to him who conquered the icy deeps of space, for knowledge calls to knowledge, even as ignorance sings in its darkness; but you have not unlocked all the mysteries, O Farnermain, else would you know how it comes that English falls from my lips, how I know Greek and Latin, Hebrew and what not. Verily, you are stupid!"

And she stamped her pretty sandaled foot lightly on the carpeted floor, smiling at me archly.

"Of a truth, you are stupid. But no, you are not. Forgive me. How could you know? And yet why can you not see? I have told you the fact: I am a —what do you call us Venus people? Cythereans, Venusians? What name do you use?"

"Usually Venusians."

"Well, my Farnermain, I am a Venusian, and no Terrestrial ever set foot on this planet before you three. Have patience, O Farnermain. Soon will the mystery be unlocked for you."

"Pardon me, O Draconda," I said humbly; and yet, for the life of me, I could not believe that she had spoken the truth, nor could I see why she should tell us a lie about the matter. "Pardon me, I pray you, O Draconda; but, to my poor intellect—"

"Nay, mention it not," she interrupted, smiling her quick and wondrous smile. "And now, if it be favored of you, my guests, we shall leave this room —but no, not yet; almost had I forgotten my sister."

"Does she too speak English?" Henry asked. "But, then, surely she does."

"No; not a word can she speak," was Draconda's amazing answer. "She does not even know what English is."

Draconda's sister was standing on one side of the throne, and near her, was our old friend The Wolf, whose face was as dark as Erebus.

The queen said something to the girl, who descended from the dais and came slowly toward us, like a timid deer. She had dark brown hair and eyes of blue, and was exceedingly beautiful. Her age I put at about eighteen.

"My sister," said the queen, taking the girl's hand, "my only sister—Nytes."

Draconda made the introduction as well as the language difficulty allowed, and very well did she make it under that difficulty. The fair Nytes said she would render a million thanks to the gods for this occasion of infinite felicity (though Draconda did not translate literally) and made a remarkable and beautiful genuflection; and Henry and myself, wishing to render back as much as we had received from the fair Venusian, kowtowed a magnificent salaam, which, I noted, caused the corners of Draconda's mouth to twitch with suppressed amusement.

No doubt we did it awkwardly, for, if one wishes to salaam well, he must salaam often.

"Is that the manner wherewith you now go through an introduction on the earth?" she asked. "Then of a surety, have many and mighty changes occurred in recent years—some of them, I fear, not for the better."

"Nothing is constant but change, O Draconda," I made grave answer, "as no doubt you have heard before."

She laughed a little. When she spoke, it was in a changed voice.

"There," she said, "is he who imprisoned you in that mountain tomb and, as it were, wounded your companion so sorely."

And I saw a troubled expression in her eyes as they rested, in a manner somewhat vacuous, on the handsome face of Ta Antom, who, like every other Ve-

nusian in the great hall, was the very picture of amazement.

Also, I had seen him give Henry Quainfan, and so had the queen, several looks in which shone unbridled malignancy.

"I had seen him," I told her. "I had seen and recognized Ta Antom. One does not easily forget old friends."

"Especially," Henry added, "friends so deeply interested in one's spiritual welfare, with so ardent a desire to raise one's soul above the sordid things of the earth."

Draconda smiled a little at this inimitable wit of ours, but she made no answer.

That troubled look had not left her eyes, which returned to the lowering face of The Wolf.

"And we have forgotten to thank you, O Draconda," I said, "for rescuing us from that tomb chamber. To you we owe it that we are not lying there in that mountain blackness. To you we owe our lives; and, if ever the time comes when we can repay the debt we owe you—"

"You owe me no debt," she interrupted me in a voice somewhat absent. "But perchance that time you have in mind will come sooner than—what am I saying? Do not, I pray you, talk of thanks to me, who am made inexpressibly happy by your coming. 'Tis I that thank God in heaven that you were saved!"

And she sent a shy glance in Henry's direction, a glance that made me wince and the blood hiss in my ears as a serpent hisses, that made The Wolf's dark face grow darker still and the lovely Mynine's visible hand clench so that the pretty knuckles became livid spots.

"So talk not of thanks to me, O Farnermain," the queen went on. "And now let us leave this room, so that we can have where to sit, to talk without having all these staring eyes upon us; and truly you have much to tell me."

"Not so much, I fancy, O Draconda, as you have to tell us. And why—oh, why—will you not unlock the mystery now?"

"Soon, my Farnermain," she answered in a musing, troubled manner. "Soon will the mystery, which troubles you so sorely, be made clear. And now let us leave this room—but no; first I must speak to the people. They too will want an explanation, but I shall not make it clear to them now. The time is not meet. Perchance I shall be able—"

There was a momentary pause.

"See that pursy man," she went on with a marked alteration of voice and manner, "near him of the noble countenance and the white beard: that man is the high priest, and, of a verity, he is a son of Satan."

I liked the appearance of the old man, who, as Draconda had said, was noble of countenance; but certainly I did not like the looks of that sleek-faced, snake-eyed high priest, whose name, we soon learned, was Sallysherib.

Our mysterious Draconda now addressed the people, speaking earnestly for two or three minutes. Then ensued a hot dialogue with Sallysherib, one of the most evil-looking men I ever have laid eyes on. All the Venusians listened greedily, as if in fear they might lose a syllable. Soon it became patent that the priest was getting the worst of it. The queen remained calm; but Sallysherib's face became suffused with choleric blood, and he choked and spluttered in his wrath and finally stood speechless.

And the end of the matter was that this sacerdotal son of Satan "begged" the queen's permission to leave the room, which readily was given, and then, with a vicious little bow, he turned and marched away, honoring Henry and myself with a look truly malignant as he was vanishing between the curtains, held aside for his spectacular exit.

Henry and I looked at each other significantly.

"Confound it," said I to myself, "that old cock had gone to sharpen his spurs, and, if our beautiful feathers don't fly, I miss my guess."

There was silence for a little space, during which Draconda stood plunged in thought.

"Let us go now," she said.

She addressed something to The Wolf, who, it was clear, was in no serene state of mind—the man giving an answer short and sullen.

Then this mysterious queen took Henry's left hand and my right, and, as unseen trumpets sounded, she led us from the great hall, followed by Princess Nytes, Mynine and that noble-looking old man.

Such was our meeting with Draconda.

And there was soon to occur, in another room in this palace, a meeting even more strange.

This Remarkable Story Will Be Continued in the Next Issue of WEIRD TALES. Don't Miss the Next Installment. It is Filled with Strange and Exciting Events.

The Passing of Tyre and Sidon

ALTHOUGH the names of Tyre and Sidon, because of their recurrence in the Bible and in literature that has borrowed its imagery from scripture, are more familiar to the civilized world than those of some cities of a million inhabitants, the actual places are seldom seen by strangers.

These cities—or city-sites, for today Tyre is only an inconsiderable town of about 6,000 inhabitants, although it was once the prize for which kings and conquerors contended—suggest thoughts of the passing of the pomp and power of the past—"Sic transit gloria mundi." Pharaohs of Egypt, kings of Assyria and Babylon and Persia and Greece and Rome, as well as the Crusaders and the Moslems, all fought furious battles and maintained incredible sieges for the capture of Tyre. Although incrusted with historical associations and literary traditions, this once-powerful Tyre, which supplanted Carthage and established colonies in Europe and was mistress of the Mediterranean, is now a ruin with few traces of its ancient grandeur, all having been submerged by sand and sea.

Sidon is unlike all the other cities of the world. Even the East of which it is a part has no other surviving city to compare with it. Perhaps the streets are not as old as they seem; for the city was cruelly decimated again and again during the period of the Crusades—not to speak of its earlier vicissitudes and glories—yet the vaulted highways, low and narrow, impress a visitor as having the flavor of immemorial antiquity. The arched bazaars of Constantinople and Damascus and the few vaulted streets of old Jerusalem, are not to be compared with the covered thoroughfares of Sidon.

CREATURES *of the* NIGHT

By A. P. McMAHON

HARRISON himself would not tell you this story. Right after it occurred he could think and talk of nothing else. His friends found it so incredible that he was suspected of mental unbalance, and only after he resolved to avoid discussing it was he set at liberty. But the friends of his youth have all passed beyond now, and to me, as his trusted confidant, he one night told the story in detail.

Harrison has for years held a famous chair in one of the foremost Eastern universities, and I shall repeat his story as accurately as I can remember it, trying to let him tell it in his own way and leaving out the quotation marks. Needless to say, he will probably deny that this story has anything to do with him, even if you ask him.

Imagine us, then, comfortably seated in the professor's dimly-lighted study, before us an open box of cigars, with a bottle from the scholar's carefully hoarded stock of pre-Volstead nectar. The varicolored bindings of the thousands of books which line the study walls are reflected softly in the dark recesses of the room. Professor Harrison is telling me in his even, cultured voice the story of the Terrors by Night:

Hair-raising adventures right here in New Harbor? You might not think it possible, perhaps. But I know. There are times when the dark and malicious forces that hide behind the veil of Nature come forth, free to assault and lay waste the minds of those whom they chance to meet. There are many persons who could tell you stories as strange as that which I am telling you, but they are afraid to.

And those who have not had any such adventures are even more afraid—afraid that they may some night themselves meet such weird beings. Just as we put murderers and dangerous criminals in jail, or even execute them, so we thrust those who have seen the terrors by night into asylums and other institutions. By keeping out of sight those who have actually seen the Terrors, we hope to deny their existence and forget them.

I love the night. When you cherish the darkness and prefer it to the coarser glare of day, you are able to penetrate deeper into what really is. Landscapes and buildings, which by day are ugly and stupid, at night become beautiful and interesting.

Have you never noticed that the same thing happens with people? Faces and forms that would never win a second glance on the street at noon, become mystical and immensely important as they vaguely move through the nocturnal shadows. The poetic and imaginative creations that spring from the brains of writers turn into realities and take visible form before our eyes.

It was a calm night early in June, many years ago, when I suddenly awoke after a few hours sleep. From my childhood days I have been able to sleep soundly only after dawn, not before it. During the hours when the sun deserts this hemisphere my thoughts race along eagerly as they never do in broad daylight.

I was as fully alive and awake as it is possible for a poor human being of ordinary flesh and bones to be. The air was miraculously still, and the trees outside the dormitory windows were as motionless and rigid as if they were enclosed in a dome of glass or had been frozen stiff.

That very day I had successfully passed my examinations for honors. To be sure, I was never a student to whom learning comes easily. It was always a hard struggle for me to master a deep book, but I was resolved to be a scholar, and I had by dint of intense and prolonged study come out at the head of my college class. I need not tell you, who have studied under my direction, what degrees and honors have come to me since I concentrated in a field of science in which I am called by many of my colleagues the most learned of living men.

That night, I repeat, I had come home from a little party of friends who had assembled to congratulate me on attaining the head of the class. It had been a very quiet party, after all. We had had a few bottles of wine and a very substantial dinner. We were limited in funds and not able to carry dissipation very far. I had reached my dormitory at about eleven o'clock, and soon after I had dropped off to sleep.

Then I suddenly awoke, as I just stated, and at once noted an extraordinary sensation of clearness and calm in the atmosphere. There was a feeling of suspense, of expectation, something like holding your breath and wondering how long your lungs and heart can stand it. I glanced at the clock, whose face stood out visible in the moonlight, and noted that it was five after one.

I felt an insuperable desire to go out, to run and race my shadow in the moonlight. Somebody seemed to be calling me, and I felt that my presence was urgently required somewhere. The compulsion to arrive at the class-room that I feel whenever the hours for my lecture arrives was never more irresistible. I knew that I was tired and ought to get a good rest in preparation for the trials of Commencement Day. But I could not withstand that summons. Follow it I must. Out there in the silent, silvery moonlight I was wanted. I could not linger nor hesitate longer.

Not a leaf was stirring when I finally dressed and went out. There was nobody visible anywhere about the college campus. As soon as I began to walk I felt imperceptibly guided. I knew where I must go. It was not in this vicinity, but a mile or more beyond the town, to a half-developed park where young folks sometimes wandered to spoon on warm summer evenings, but which would be quite deserted at this hour.

The wide-sweeping elms that adorn this part of the country seemed to open an avenue straight to the place where I should go. I hardly noticed the streets and the country roads along which I passed in haste. But these giant plants that have weathered the years and seen thousands of human beings scurry by only to disappear, while they still survive, were aware of me. They watched me in awe and amazement as they drew back their mighty arms and made way for me.

Even so I was bathed and drenched in a shower of peace and happiness. The obscurity of the cloudless night was soft and delicate. The moon looked down upon me with interest and marked each step of mine. My shadow swung its arms wildly, dangled its legs, doubling and twisting its head as it fell on a smooth stone wall or fluttered along in the wagon ruts.

At last I reached the park.

For a moment I stood undecided. In the distance I heard a sound. It was like the muffled, pleading groan of somebody

moaning in his sleep, filled with a strange unknown distress whose nature we can only surmise. It must be there, I thought.

All this time I was not afraid. I was protected and enveloped in an armor of confidence. No doubt something illuminating and potent would be revealed to me that night, though how or by whom, I knew not. I hurried on. The spot whither I turned my steps was in a gully where the sand and clay had been washed out by a flood some years before, and the rough underbrush and bushes had never been able to hide the yellow and red undersoil that gleamed through the thick surrounding sod like a bleeding wound.

Tales had been told of curious events noted by late passers-by in this remote and solitary spot. The headless body of an unclothed infant had been found here one morning. It was said that unsuspecting lovers loitering here had several times seen a headless, childlike form feebly stretching out its arms to them in the moonlight, a sight from which they had fled away in terror. But after the flood, which had torn out the scarred hillside, a tiny skull had been discovered and decently buried, after which nothing unusual had been observed, probably because the spot was avoided.

While I had been somewhat interested in the supernatural, the subject was of only slight importance in my studies, and I had reserved it for leisurely reading at some vacation period. I neither believed, nor disbelieved, at that time. And I was not afraid.

It was rather darker than elsewhere at the entrance to the glen. My foot slipped several times as I cautiously descended its sloping sides. When I reached the bottom, I was disconcerted to note that even the grassy plains of the park had become gloomy. Although I had seen not a single cloud in the sky to threaten the moon's dominion of the heavens, something had happened—a great purple-black curtain had been drawn up across the skies and extinguished the moon and its light.

In the midst of this gully there was the battered trunk of an elm that stood almost overturned, with knotted and twisted roots, some interlaced and twined like the snakes in the head of Medusa, some pathetically projecting like the stumps of a maimed and crippled human form.

As I slipped and staggered among the roots and stumps, I was suddenly stopped. My foot was caught—jammed in between the roots, I supposed, and I attempted to pull it away. But I could not disentangle myself, so I stooped down to get a nearer view.

A huge hand, sickly white, with knotted blue-black veins standing out on it, was gripped about my ankle!

I looked closer and saw a long arm, angular and rigid like the arm of a tarantula, lying along the ground, leading to the shoulder of a thick-set form, whose features I could not clearly perceive. But it was a man that held me in this strange fashion, a man who was not himself near the ground, but was sitting, bent and crouched, on top of the weather-beaten stump of which I have already spoken. His arm must have been at least twice his own height, as it then stretched out and snatched me like a fly.

And then the arm began to draw me in toward him, and the arm gradually disappeared into his shoulder, as the tongue of an ant-eater is sucked back into its mouth. I attempted to break the hold of this long bony arm that held me prisoner. My efforts were in vain. Kicking, beating and struggling, I was dragged relentlessly over the uneven ground to the very base of the stump.

There I lay for a moment, exhausted, too surprised and shaken to know what I ought to do next. I was cut and torn by the stones and sharp branches over which I had been irresistibly pulled, and I felt the blood beginning to trickle down my cheeks, but I did not cry out or call for help. I knew that would be useless.

Nothing happened for a second or two. The huge, repulsive hand held me in its close grip and made no further move. I wondered if some fierce bird of prey would sweep down through the trees from the opaque sky and begin to rip out my vitals or pick my skull. Something unimaginable was, I felt, about to happen.

Nothing occurred for a second or two. But presently a shape appeared—a large undistinguishable shape at first, creeping, slipping and sliding painfully along the ground through the underbrush. There was a noise of crackling and breaking as it came along, demolishing the upstanding twigs and brush in its way.

It progressed like a sloth, its head close to the ground, parting as best it could, clumsily and awkwardly, the undergrowth in front of it. The thing was large and round, and when it drew near enough I saw that its nails were long and sharp, like those of a bear, and, although its hands were calloused and gnarled, they looked human.

Over its face hung a thick curtain of tangled, meshed hair, and its whole body was a mass of hair matted with leaves and mud. As it came near, the repugnant being lifted its head, shaking back the hairy mane. It had a small, circular mouth and it puckered up its thick, bright red lips as it lifted its face toward me, sniffing suspiciously with a nose so flat against its face from pushing along the ground that there was scarcely a sign of nostrils. I gazed, fascinated, and looked for its eyes. It had a slight trace of a forehead, but eyes there were none.

I had been so terrified by this strange monster that I did not at first observe that still another being had approached me. It was coming from behind the tree stump. But I had seen enough to know that the unbelievable thing that crawled along the earth on its belly was, or had been, human.

The third being then came nearer. It was tall and slender, moving with a gentle grace, like a tall flower swaying in the wind. While the other two were of an odd hue, like the bark of a storm-stained tree, this was a pronounced green.

The point that interested me most about this creature was its face. It was calm and dignified. I could see it clearly and definitely, although everything else was veiled in mist and damp, penetrating gloom. Her eyes were downcast and a smile lingered on her lips, so faintly pink, although her cheeks were pale and transparent as if they were moulded of wax. This is a real human being, I thought.

She seemed to be unaware of me. She came nearer with a delicate step, the soft green draperies fluttering about her like mossy streamers hanging from the branches of some southern forest. But she did not seem to see us. Never once did she lift her eyes, nor did that sweet smile vary.

Nevertheless, she made her way directly to me, and then placed one long slender hand lightly on my arm, without once looking up. With the other hand she made a gesture as if to arrange her flowing hair or smooth her pale, waxy cheeks.

Then I saw her face begin to revolve, like a door on its hinges! Her delicate, beautiful hands opened her waxy face as one might the door of a clock. Within was a grinning skull, with dark, clotted fragments of ligaments and blood vessels stretched across it.

Consciousness left me then. For days I seemed to lie buried beneath the waves, miles and miles below the water, and from time to time I was gently

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The Clank of Chains; a Whisper in the Dark; a Woman's Scream of Terror; and Then—Read

The House in the Forest

A Strange Tale

By HAROLD WARD

"A WOMAN'S scream, shrill and filled with agony! A low guttural muttering. The crowd rushed in from all sides. When they arrived they found her lying dead, her throat torn and bleeding, her face disfigured, her clothing ripped almost from her body.

"And not a sign of a footprint but her own. Not a single trace of the murderer anywhere. She was killed—murdered in cold blood! Choked to death! How? We want you to run down her slayer and bring the wretch to justice. The business men of Como are ready to pay any amount—even into the thousands—only put the guilt where it belongs. Will you take the case?"

Thus, tersely and to the point, did John Brayton, the mayor of Como, summarize the peculiar and horrible crime that had caused a wave of rage to sweep over the entire vicinity.

I hesitated. My time was filled to the limit. My men were all out on big cases—cases from which I did not dare to take them. Yet here was an opportunity to accommodate an old friend. I have long since given up active work, devoting my time to the business end of my agency. But here seemed an opportunity to pick up a little easy money and, at the same time, demonstrate to the youngsters of my force that the "old man" had not yet lost the cunning which had made me—if I may say it without egotism—one of America's greatest man hunters.

Briefly stated, the case was a peculiar one, yet one I believed, from what Brayton had told me, I could solve. The business men of the little town of Como had closed up their stores the day previous and gone to the woods in a body for a community picnic. Miss Claire, one of the picnickers—a girl of unusual beauty, and extremely popular with all who knew her—had quarreled with her sweetheart during the afternoon, following which she had wandered off into the woods a quarter of a mile from the others, probably to enjoy a woman's privilege—a good cry.

They had heard her cries for help. Rushing to the spot, they found things as Brayton had described. The murdered girl's fiance, James Finch, had a clean cut alibi; he had been with the others when the screams were heard and was among the first to reach the slain girl's side.

Naturally, so popular a girl had had other suitors, but according to Brayton all were accounted for at the time of the murder. It looked more like the work of some tramp or wandering degenerate—only there was still to be accounted for the lack of footprints.

The Como police force, consisting of a single constable, had been able to do nothing. Nor had the sheriff's office done any better. The county officers joined with the business men in asking that my services be secured.

Before Brayton finished his narrative, I had decided to accept the commission. I told him of my decision much to his relief, and we were about to enter his car to start for the litle village when the telephone on my desk rang violently. It was a long distance call for Brayton. He answered, then suddenly grew white faced.

"Great God!" he exclaimed.

He turned to me, his hand over the transmitter. "There's been another mysterious murder!" he whispered huskily. "In the same woods. Another woman, the wife of a farmer. The body was torn and mangled as in the case of Miss Claire. And not a single clew. What shall I tell them? The body has been undisturbed, waiting for news from me."

"Tell them to leave things alone and keep away from the spot!" I exclaimed, leaping for my hat. "Order them not to tramp over the ground or disturb any clews! For we're going to get there as fast as that big touring car of yours can carry us."

Shouting his directions into the phone, Brayton rushed out with me, and an instant later we were burning up the smooth asphalt road towards Como.

WE reached the village in the dusk of the late afternoon to find the little place agog with excitement over the second murder within two days. In company with the constable and a half dozen of the leading citizens, we set out for the scene of the tragedy, arriving just as the sun was sinking over the western horizon.

A little group surrounding the body gave way at our approach—all except the victim's husband, a stolid-faced yokel with a tiny, unkempt youngster hanging onto his hand, who sat a short distance away from the body, his head bowed in grief, his eyes filled with unshed tears.

The dead woman lay under a huge tree with low, overhanging branches, located deep in the forest. My orders by telephone had been scrupulously carried out, for, with the exception of the footprints made by the husband when, alarmed at his wife's prolonged absence, he had set out to find her, there was not a single mark on the soft, spongy ground except those made by the woman herself.

Like that of the earlier victim, the body was badly mangled. The neck had been broken, the head being twisted grotesquely out of angle with the trunk. The upper clothing was torn almost from the body, while the flesh was bruised and battered as by a giant fist.

Such an investigation as I could make by the light of my flash light and lanterns hastily procured from nearby farmhouses failed to disclose even the vestige of a clew to work on.

Nor did the story told by the husband assist me any. One of the cows had broken out of the pasture a quarter of a mile away while he had been at work in the fields, he said, dumbly. He being busy, his wife had volunteered to go in search of the straying animal. After an absence of nearly an hour, seeing the cow returning leisurely to the stable and his wife not yet having returned, he had tied his team and gone to look for her, thinking that perhaps some accident had befallen her. He had found her just as we had seen her.

Unlike the case of Miss Claire, however, he had heard no cries, nor had he seen any strangers in the vicinity either that day, or the day before. His wife had been dead a considerable time when he discovered her, and she had been killed too far away from the house for him to have heard the noise of the struggle from the field in which he was at work.

Clearly, the husband did not possess sufficient imagination to commit a clewless murder. Hence I did not advise holding him, but turned my attention to searching in other directions.

My efforts were fruitless. At every angle I ran up against a blank wall. There was nothing from which to make a start.

Turning the body over to the coroner and the sheriff, who arrived shortly after us, Mayor Brayton and I returned to Como. The darkness of the dense forest had put a stop to any more investigations for the night.

THE following morning I took up my work in earnest. Visiting the local undertaking establishment, I attended the inquest over the body of the first victim of the murderer, then announced to Brayton and several others my intention of going back into the forest to look the ground over in daylight immediately after lunch.

But the night had brought upon the citizens a sort of terror of the unknown. The constable, with downcast eyes and crimsoned cheeks, apologized for not being able to accompany me, asserting that his wife had passed a bad night and could not be left alone. The sheriff was but little braver, having found, he said, that sudden business called him into another part of the country. Brayton alone offered to go with me. His offer was made, however, with such reluctance that I gravely informed him that I would go alone, adding that I could think better when by myself—greatly, I believe, to his relief.

I allowed him, however, to take me to the edge of the woods in his machine, where he dropped me after giving me precise directions how to find the spot where Miss Claire had met her death.

Striking out at a brisk walk, I reached the place within half an hour and made a thorough examination, failing, however, to find anything that would add to my store of knowledge. But this I felt, was due to the fact that the ground had been so thoroughly tramped over the day of the murder that even had there been anything out of the ordinary it would have been eliminated by the overzealous country officials.

Yet there was something that gave me cause for speculation. I climbed into the lower branches of the tree under which the body had been found. On one of them were several peculiar marks as if someone wearing hobnailed shoes had been hidden among the leaves. I had no way of ascertaining whether the amateur sleuths had searched the branches or not, but inasmuch as Brayton had said nothing about it, nor had it been mentioned at the inquest, I was safe in presuming that I was the first to make the discovery. It was a step in the right direction at any rate, I felt.

With this as a starting point, I sat down under a great oak a short distance away and tried to reason the thing out from every angle.

HOW long I sat absorbed in my own thoughts I do not know. Possibly hours. At any rate, I was suddenly aroused from my reverie by the fact that darkness had commenced to settle down. I looked at my watch. It was past six o'clock. In the blackness of the forest it grew dark early and, to make matters worse, a storm was impending. Already the skies were overcast and checked here and there by nasty forked streaks of lightning.

I leaped to my feet and started out to retrace my steps. I had gone possibly half a mile when night settled down in earnest and, a few minutes later, the storm burst in all its fury. The rain fell in sheets accompanied by a wind that bent even the monarchs of the forest. Heavy branches fell about me. My haste to get out of the accursed place may have had something to do with the matter, but, at any rate, I suddenly awoke to the realization that I was hopelessly lost.

I quickened my steps and hurried on. But the further I progressed the more certain I was that I was getting deeper into the forest. Finally, in desperation, I turned and struck out in a new direction.

I had probably been walking two hours when, suddenly, a little clearing appeared before me in the midst of which was set, as best I could observe by the lightning flashes, a tumbledown house. In one of the windows a light gleamed through the rain and storm. Never in all my eventful career have I welcomed anything as joyfully as I did that spot of light. With my heart beating happily I hurried on toward its source.

The place appeared, as best I could make out, to be of two stories and a lean-to, with a flat roof and high, crumbling chimneys. Many of the windows were covered by weatherbeaten boards. On others the shutters hung from broken hinges. The yard was filled with weeds and clumps of high, coarse grass, with here and there a mournful evergreen tree to add to the general dismal aspect of the place.

I approached the door by means of an ancient brick walk, nearly getting a bad fall as a result of a loose board in the porch floor, before I gained it. I pounded lustily several times before I could elicit a response.

Finally the stumping of feet reached my ear. The key turned and the door swung slowly back with many a protesting squeak of its rusty hinges the space of a few inches, and a tall, unkempt man with long gray beard and hair, holding aloft an ancient lamp which smoked and spluttered in the draught, gazed out at me with a sour expression.

"What d'ye want?" he demanded ungraciously.

I explained my predicament as best I could and asked for supper and a night's lodging. When I had finished he looked me over with evident disapproval.

"I'm not running a hotel," he growled. "The road's only half a mile away."

He was about to close the door in my face when I managed to stick my foot in the crack and hold it open for the minute.

"But, my dear sir," I exclaimed in as wheedling a tone as I could assume, "I have been out in this entire storm. I am wet, chilled to the bone and hungry. Surely you can find some place to put me up. Anywhere will do."

He was about to refuse again when a woman's voice, thin and trembling, piped up:

"Let the poor stranger in, Hank. I can get him a snack to eat and he can sleep in the spare room."

Still grumbling, he opened the door a trifle wider and I slid in. Banging the door behind me and locking it with painstaking care, he led me down a mildewed hall to an antiquated kitchen located in the lean-to. He put the lamp down on the table while I underwent the squinting inspection of an old woman, half-blind, wrinkled and bent, evidently his wife.

Despite her seeming infirmities, she soon placed a cold lunch out on the table, chattering and clucking to herself as she did so, while her husband, saying nothing, eyed me with ill concealed malevolence as I disposed of my meagre supper.

Cold as it was, and poorly cooked, I have never had a meal that tasted better, so tired and exhausted was I.

No sooner had I completed my repast than the old fellow again picked up the lamp and, with a nod toward me, declared that it was bed time and that he was tired. And, truth to tell, I was ready for bed myself.

The room into which he led me was stuffy and filled with mildew. I attempted to raise a window, only to find that it was tightly boarded on the outside. Evidently the place had been unoccupied for a long time. On the tumbledown bed was a soiled comforter and an even more dirty pillow without a covering. The only other furniture the room boasted was a chair with one leg missing. Before I could complete my inventory, he stumped out with the lamp, leaving me to undress and crawl into bed as best I could in total darkness.

The room oppressed me. Not only was it the stuffiness, the tomblikeness, but the general air of antiquity and mystery that surrounded the old house and its occupants. Outside, I could hear the rain beating against the sides and roof of the house. The venerable old pile seemed filled with rats; their squealing and scurrying across the floor annoyed me for what seemed hours. The boards of the floor squeaked and groaned, while the wind caused the trees just outside my window to moan and sigh as it hurled them to and fro. Sleep was an impossibility, despite my exhausted condition.

Then, suddenly, I sat upright in bed, my ears pricked up, listening, I knew not what for, every nerve on edge.

With that sixth sense that all good detectives must possess came the thought that in this old house lay the key to the two mysterious murders I was seeking to solve. Call it intuition, or what you will, I was confident that this was the reason for my peculiar restlessness.

Crawling slowly out of the protesting bed and making as little noise as I possibly could, I hurriedly dressed, groping in the darkness for my sodden clothes. Then I crept to the door in my stockinged feet and opened it a crack.

As I did so I heard a noise. It sounded to my straining ears like the rattling of chains.

A door of one of the rooms down the hall was ringed with light. Halting just outside my room, I listened again. The place seemed filled with a whisper, hoarse—almost a low, rumbling bass, filled with menace. It was awful—inhuman. My flesh rose in goose pimples at the sound.

"Fer Gawd's sake, Hank, chain him tight!" I heard the woman say in her peculiar, cackling whisper.

There came to my ears again the rattle of chains. And once more that low, bass rumbling—menacing, angry— followed by what sounded like a blow.

"I'll fix ye, damn ye!" I heard the old man mutter.

I crept closer and closer to the door from behind which came the vague whispers. For a second there was silence, broken only by the man's asthmatic breathing and the slight rattle of the chains.

SUDDENLY I heard an angry roar. Then came a woman's piercing scream. The sound of blows! Then the scream again and a menacing, barking growl.

Leaping to my feet and drawing my revolver, I seized the knob of the door and turned it.

It was locked. Stepping back, I threw my entire weight against it. The rusty hinges gave way before my onslaught and I leaped into the room.

Chained in one corner was a huge black man with the head of an ape, his face twisted with rage. His tiny eyes glowed and burned, his thick lips were writhed back from huge, yellow fangs which chattered his fury. His hair, matted and coarse, hung down over his squatty forehead.

In his arms was the form of the old woman. The old man was beating the brute over the head with his stick. Just as I appeared, the creature hurled the old crone from him and, before the man could leap to safety, had seized him by the throat.

With a single twist of his brawny hands, the brute twisted his victim's neck until I could hear it snap. Then, dropping the palpitating body, he leaped toward me, his fangs bared, his venomous, menacing eyes advertising his hate.

So terrific was the strength exhibited that staple and part of the wall came with him. He reached one long arm for me as I jumped for the door, firing as I fled.

My bullet had no more effect on the raging creature than a pebble thrown by a child. I sent a stream of lead at it, filling its body with bullets until the magazine of my automatic was emptied. But still he came, shrieking with fury.

With a flying leap, the brute seized me. His long fingers grasped my throat! I felt the breath being choked out of me—

Then, suddenly, the terrific hold gave way and with a hollow cough he crumpled up in a heap at my feet, dead, the blood flowing from a half a dozen wounds.

For a second I stood leaning against the wall, my breath coming in gasps. Then, recovering myself, I seized the lamp which, through some peculiar circumstance, had not been overturned despite the rickety table on which it stood, and made a hasty examination. The man was dead, his neck broken. The little old woman still breathed, however. Gathering her up in my arms, I carried her into the room I had occupied and laid her on the bed.

Running back, I secured the lamp, and attempted to administer first aid. She opened her eyes for an instant, recognizing me. Seizing my hand in her skinny talons, she drew me close to her and poured forth her story. Then, with a deep sigh of relief, she closed her eyes and, a second later, her soul had passed into eternity.

BRIEFLY, she and her husband had been circus performers in their younger days, he owning the ape-faced boy act in a sideshow and she assisting him. Growing too old for their profession, they had retired with their small savings, buying the little tumbledown house in the midst of the forest in which to spend their declining years.

Hank, her husband, had laid the basis of his good fortune on the work done by "Jingo," his black, malformed idiot, and had insisted on bringing the creature with him instead of selling it with the remainder of the show. For years the old couple had led a cloistered existence in the midst of the forest, happy in their retirement, their only contention being the brute-faced black. Mrs. Lang, as she called herself, had demanded that the thing be sold, while Lang, who was evidently a contrary old fellow, objected. Of late, however, close confinement—for they feared letting the demented creature out, even under guard, because of their neighbors—had told on him and he had gradually grown ugly and more violent than usual until even Lang had difficulty in handling him.

On the day of the murder of Miss Claire, "Jingo" had broken his bonds and escaped among the trees. Hanging from a low limb, he had seized the poor girl and strangled her to death, afterward throwing her body to the ground where it was found, and escaping among the trees, which accounted for the lack of footprints. Lang searched the forest for the brute, only finding him the fol-

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Masterpieces of Weird Fiction

No. 6. Never Bet the Devil Your Head

A Tale with a Moral

By EDGAR ALLAN POE

"Con tal que las costumbres de un autor," says Don Thomas De Las Torres, in the preface to his "Amatory Poems," *"sean puras y castas, importa muy poco que no sean igualmente severas sus obras"*—meaning, in plain English, that, provided the morals of an author are pure, personally, it signifies nothing what are the morals of his books. We presume that Don Thomas is now in Purgatory for the assertion. It would be a clever thing, too, in the way of poetical justice, to keep him there until his "Amatory Poems" get out of print, or are laid definitely upon the shelf through lack of readers. Every fiction *should have* a moral; and, what is more to the purpose, the critics have discovered that every fiction *has*. Philip Melancthon, some time ago, wrote a commentary upon the "Batrachomyomachia" and proved that the poet's object was to excite a distaste for sedition. Pierre La Seine, going a step farther, shows that the intention was to recommend to young men temperance in eating and drinking. Just so, too, Jacobus Hugo has satisfied himself that, by Euenis, Homer meant to insinuate John Calvin; by Antinous, Martin Luther; by the Lotophagi, Protestants in general; and, by the Harpies, the Dutch. Our more modern Scholiasts are equally acute. These fellows demonstrate a hidden meaning in "The Antediluvians," a parable in "Powhatan," new views in "Cock Robin" and transcendentalism in "Hop O' My Thumb." In short, it has been shown that no man can sit down to write without a very profound design. Thus to authors in general much trouble is spared. A novelist, for example, need have no care of his moral. It is there—that is to say it is somewhere—and the moral and the critics can take care of themselves. When the proper time arrives, all that the gentleman intended, and all that he did not intend, will be brought to light, in the "Dial," or the "Down-Easter," together with all that he ought to have intended, and the rest that he clearly meant to intend—so that it will all come very straight in the end.

There is no just ground, therefore, for the charge brought against me by certain ignoramuses—that I have never written a moral tale, or, in more precise words, a tale with a moral. They are not the critics predestined to bring me out, and *develop* my morals—that is the secret. By and by the "North American Quarterly Humdrum" will make them ashamed of their stupidity. In the meantime, by way of staying execution—by way of mitigating the accusations against me—I offer the sad history appended—a history about whose obvious moral there can be no question whatever, since he who runs may read it in the large capitals which form the title of the tale. I should have credit for this arrangement—a far wiser one than that of La Fontaine and others, who reserve the impression to be conveyed until the last moment, and thus sneak it in at the fag end of their fables.

Defuncti injuria ne afficiantur was a law of the twelve tables, and *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* is an excellent injunction—even if the dead in question be nothing but dead small beer. It is not my design, therefore, to vituperate my deceased friend, Toby Dammit. He was a sad dog, it is true, and a dog's death it was that he died; but he himself was not to blame for his vices. They grew out of a personal defect in his mother. She did her best in the way of flogging him while an infant—for duties to her well-regulated mind were always pleasures, and babies, like tough steaks, or the modern Greek olive trees, are invariably the better for beating—but, poor woman! she had the misfortune to be left-handed, and a child flogged left-handedly had better be left unflogged. The world revolves from right to left. It will not do to whip a baby from left to right. If each blow in the proper direction drives an evil propensity out, it follows that every thump in an opposite one knocks its quota of wickedness in. I was often present at Toby's chastisements, and, even by the way in which he kicked, I could perceive that he was getting worse and worse every day. At last I saw, through the tears in my eyes, that there was no hope of the villain at all, and one day when he had been cuffed until he grew so black in the face that one might have mistaken him for a little African, and no effect had been produced beyond that of making him wriggle himself into a fit, I could stand it no longer, but went down upon my knees forthwith, and, uplifting my voice, made prophecy of his ruin.

The fact is that his precocity in vice was awful. At five months of age he used to get into such passions that he was unable to articulate. At six months, I caught him gnawing a pack of cards. At seven months he was in the constant habit of catching and kissing the female babies. At eight months he peremptorily refused to put his signature to the Temperance pledge. Thus he went on increasing in iniquity, month after month, until, at the close of the first year, he not only insisted upon wearing *moustaches*, but had contracted a propensity for cursing and swearing, and for backing his assertions by bets.

Through this latter most ungentlemanly practice, the ruin which I had predicted to Toby Dammit overtook him at last. The fashion had "grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength," so that, when he came to be a man, he could scarcely utter a sentence without interlarding it with a proposition to gamble. Not that he actually laid wagers—no. I will do my friend the justice to say that he would as soon have laid eggs. With him the thing was a mere formula—nothing more. His expressions on this head had no meaning attached to them whatever. They were simple if not altogether innocent expletives—imaginative phrases wherewith to round off a sentence. When he said "I'll bet you so and so," nobody ever thought of taking him up; but still I could not help thinking it my duty to put him down. The habit was an immoral one, and so I told him. It was a vulgar one—this I begged him to believe. It was discountenanced by society—here I said nothing but the truth. It was forbidden by act of Congress—here I had not the slightest intention of telling a lie. I remonstrated—but to no purpose. I demonstrated—in vain. I entreated—he smiled. I implored—he laughed. I preached—he sneered. I threatened—he swore. I kicked him—he called for the police. I pulled his nose—he blew it, and offered to bet the Devil his head that I would not venture to try that experiment again.

Poverty was another vice which the peculiar physical deficiency of Dammit's mother had entailed upon her son. He was detestably poor; and this was the reason, no doubt, that his expletive expressions about betting seldom took a pecuniary turn. I will not be bound to say that I ever heard him make use of such a figure of speech as "I'll bet you a dollar." It was usually "I'll bet you what you please," or "I'll bet you what you dare," or "I'll bet you a trifle," or else, more significantly still, *"I'll bet the Devil my head."*

This latter form seemed to please him best—perhaps because it involved the least risk; for Dammit had become excessively parsimonious. Had any one taken him up, his head was small, and thus his loss would have been small too. But these are my own reflections, and I am by no means sure that I am right in attributing them to him. At all events the phrase in question grew daily in favor, notwithstanding the gross impropriety of a man betting his brains like banknotes—but this was a point which my friend's perversity of disposition would not permit him to comprehend. In the end, he abandoned all other forms of wager, and gave himself up to *"I'll bet the Devil my head,"* with a pertinacity and exclusiveness of devotion that displeased not less than it surprised me. I am always displeased by circumstances for which I cannot account. Mysteries force a man to think, and so injure his health. The truth is, there was something in *the air* with which Mr. Dammit was wont to give utterance to his offensive expression—something in his *manner* of enunciation—which at first interested, and afterward made me very uneasy—something which, for want of a more definite term at present, I must be permitted

to call *queer;* but which Mr. Coleridge would have called mystical, Mr. Kant pantheistical, Mr. Carlyle twistical, and Mr. Emerson hyperquizzitistical. I began not to like it at all. Mr. Dammit's soul was in a perilous state. I resolved to bring all my eloquence into play to save it. I vowed to serve him as St. Patrick, in the Irish Chronicle, is said to have served the toad, that is to say, "awaken him to a sense of his situation." I addressed myself to the task forthwith. Once more I betook myself to remonstrance. Again I collected my energies for a final attempt at expostulation.

When I had made an end of my lecture, Mr. Dammit indulged himself in some very equivocal behaviour. For some moments he remained silent, merely looking me inquisitively in the face. But presently he threw his head to one side, and elevated his eyebrows to great extent. Then he spread out the palms of his hands and shrugged up his shoulders. Then he winked with the right eye. Then he repeated the operation with the left. Then he shut them both up very tight. Then he opened them both so very wide that I became seriously alarmed for the consequences. Then, applying his thumb to his nose, he thought proper to make an indescribable movement with the rest of his fingers. Finally, setting his arms a-kimbo, he condescended to reply.

I can call to mind only the heads of his discourse. He would be obliged to me if I would hold my tongue. He wished none of my advice. He despised all my insinuations. He was old enough to take care of himself. Did I still think him baby Dammit? Did I mean to say anything against his character? Did I intend to insult him? Was I a fool? Was my maternal parent aware, in a word, of my absence from the domiciliary residence? He would put this latter question to me as to a man of veracity, and he would bind himself to abide by my reply. Once more he would demand explicitly if my mother knew that I was out. My confusion, he said, betrayed me, and he would be willing to bet the Devil his head that she did not.

Mr. Dammit did not pause for my rejoinder. Turning upon his heel, he left my presence with undignified precipitation. It was well for him that he did so. My feelings had been wounded. Even my anger had been aroused. For once I would have taken him up upon his insulting wager. I would have won for the Arch-Enemy Mr. Dammit's little head—for the fact is, my mamma *was* very well aware of my merely temporary absence from home.

But *Khoda shefa midêhed*—heaven gives relief—as the Musselmen say when you tread upon their toes. It was in pursuance of my duty that I had been insulted, and I bore the insult like a man. It now seemed to me, however, that I had done all that could be required of me, in the case of this miserable individual, and I resolved to trouble him no longer with my counsel, but to leave him to his conscience and himself. But although I forbore to intrude with my advice, I could not bring myself to give up his society altogether. I even went so far as to humor some of his less reprehensible propensities; and there were times when I found myself lauding his wicked jokes, as epicures do mustard, with tears in my eyes—so profoundly did it grieve me to hear his evil talk.

One fine day, having strolled out together arm in arm, our route led us in the direction of a river. There was a bridge and we resolved to cross it. It was roofed over, by way of protection from the weather, and the arch-way, having but few windows, was thus very uncomfortably dark. As we entered the passage, the contrast between the external glare, and the interior gloom, struck heavily upon my spirits. Not so upon those of the unhappy Dammit, who offered to bet the Devil his head that I was hipped. He seemed to be in an unusual good humor. He was excessively lively—so much so that I entertained I know not what of uneasy suspicion. It is not impossible that he was affected with the transcendentals. I am not well enough versed, however, in the diagnosis of this disease to speak with decision upon the point; and unhappily there were none of my friends of the "Dial" present. I suggest the idea, nevertheless, because of a certain species of austere Merry-Andrewism which seemed to beset my poor friend, and caused him to make quite a Tom-Fool of himself. Nothing would serve him but wriggling and skipping about under and over everything that came in his way; now shouting out, and now lisping out, all manner of odd little and big words, yet preserving the gravest face in the world all the time. I really could not make up my mind whether to kick or to pity him. At length having passed nearly across the bridge, we approached the termination of the footway, when our progress was impeded by a turnstile of some height. Through this I made my way quietly, pushing it around as usual. But this turn would not serve the turn of Mr. Dammit. He insisted upon leaping the stile, and said he could cut a pigeonwing over it in the air. Now this, conscientiously speaking, I did not think he could do. The best pigeon-winger over all kinds of style, was my friend Mr. Carlyle, and as I knew *he* could not do it, I would not believe that it could be done by Toby Dammit. I therefore told him, in so many words, that he was a braggadocio, and could not do what he said. For this, I had reason to be sorry afterwards—for he straightway offered to *bet the Devil his head* that he could.

I was about to reply, notwithstanding my previous resolutions, with some remonstrance against his impiety, when I heard, close at my elbow, a slight cough, which sounded very much like the ejaculation *"ahem!"* I started, and looked about me in surprise. My glance at length fell into a nook of the frame-work of the bridge, and upon the figure of a little lame old gentleman of venerable aspect. Nothing could be more reverend than his whole appearance; for, he not only had on a full suit of black, but his shirt was perfectly clean and the collar turned very neatly down over a white cravat, while his hair was parted in front like a girl's. His hands were clasped pensively together over his stomach, and his two eyes were carefully rolled up into the top of his head.

Upon observing him more closely, I perceived that he wore a black silk apron over his small-clothes; and this was a thing which I thought very odd. Before I had time to make any remark, however, upon so singular a circumstance, he interrupted me with a second *"ahem!"*

To this observation I was not immediately prepared to reply. The fact is, remarks of this laconic nature are nearly unanswerable. I have known a Quarterly Review *non-plused* by the word *"Fudge!"* I am not ashamed to say, therefore, that I turned to Mr. Dammit for assistance.

"Dammit," said I, "what are you about? don't you hear —the gentleman says *'ahem!'"* I looked sternly at my friend while I thus addressed him; for to say the truth, I felt particularly puzzled, and when a man is particularly puzzled he must knit his brows and look savage, or else he is pretty sure to look like a fool.

"Dammit," observed I—although this sounded very much like an oath, than which nothing was farther from my thoughts—"Dammit," I suggested—"the gentleman says *'ahem!'"*

I do not attempt to defend my remark on the score of profundity; I did not think it profound myself; but I have noticed that the effect of our speeches is not always proportionate with their importance in our own eyes; and if I had shot Mr. D. through and through with a Paixhan bomb, or knocked him in the head with the "Poets and Poetry of America," he could hardly have been more discomfited than when I addressed him with those simple words —"Dammit, what are you about?—don't you hear?—the gentleman says *'ahem!'"*

"You don't say so?" gasped he at length, after turning more colors than a pirate runs up, one after the other, when chased by a man-of-war. "Are you quite sure he said *that?* Well, at all events I am in for it now, and may as well put a bold face upon the matter. Here goes, then—*ahem!"*

At this the little old gentleman seemed pleased—God only knows why. He left his station at the nook of the bridge, limped forward with a gracious air, took Dammit by the hand and shook it cordially, looking all the while straight up in his face with an air of the most unadulterated benignity which it is possible for the mind of man to imagine.

"I am quite sure you will win it, Dammit," said he with the frankest of all smiles, "but we are obliged to have a trial you know, for the sake of mere form."

"Ahem!" replied my friend, taking off his coat with a deep sigh, tying a pocket-handkerchief around his waist, and producing an unaccountable alteration in his countenance by twisting up his eyes, and bringing down the corners of his mouth—"ahem!" And "ahem," said he again, after a pause; and not another word more than "ahem!" did I ever know him to say after that. "Aha!" thought I without expressing myself aloud—"that is quite a remarkable silence on the part of Toby Dammit, and is no doubt a consequence of his verbosity upon a previous occasion. One extreme induces another. I wonder if he has forgotten the many unanswerable questions which he propounded to me so fluently on the day when I gave him my last lecture? At all events, he is cured of the transcendentals."

"Ahem!" here replied Toby, just as if he had been reading my thoughts, and looking like a very old sheep in a reverie.

The old gentleman now took him by the arm and led him more into the shade of the bridge—a few paces back from the turnstile. "My good fellow," said he, "I make it a point of conscience to allow you this much run. Wait here, till I take my place by the stile, so that I may see whether you go over it handsomely and transcendentally, and don't omit any flourishes of the pigeonwing. A mere form, you know. I will say 'one, two, three, and away.' Mind you start at the word 'away.'" Here he took his position by the stile, paused a moment as if in profound reflection, then *looked up* and, I thought, smiled very slightly, then tightened the strings of his apron, then took a long look at Dammit, and finally gave the word as agreed upon—

One—two—three—and away!

Punctually, at the word "away," my poor friend set off in a strong gallop. The stile

(Continued on page 82)

The Spirit Fakers of Hermannstadt

(*Continued from page 6*)

He raised his voice to a shrill, terrified scream, and his confederates rushed into the room and were upon me. There were four men instead of the two that were expected. I was quickly trussed and thrown to one corner of the room, where one of the men sat guard over me with a drawn revolver, to prevent me from undoing my bonds and escaping.

The two servants of the castle had come in alarm at hearing the noise of the combat. They were quickly overcome, and tied into chairs. Then the accomplices, under the direction of Popkens, from whose face the grin had faded, calmly proceeded to tie the hands of the Countess and Rosicka who had shrunk, terrified, to the corner of the room.

I was as much suprised as anyone at the sudden turn events had taken. When I had acceded to the request of the Countess I had expected merely a stormy scene when I denounced the medium from Hermannstadt to prevent him from wresting the secret that would enable him to blackmail the family out of all its possessions. But now I found myself the prisoner of five desperate men, in a Hungarian castle, and these men bore me a deep and serious grudge for spoiling their game. If they killed me, my friends would never know what had happened to me. Certainly Popkens had reason to hate me.

The two witnesses who had come from Hermannstadt to witness Rosicka's document had, of course, been summoned by Popkens, and not by spirits. He had arranged with them before he left Hermannstadt, and knew the very hour they were expected at Castle D—. His object in perpetrating this hoax on Rosicka was obvious: he wanted her to believe that the spirit message from her mother was authentic, and how better could he accomplish this than by having the spirit of the dead woman announce that the witnesses were coming, and then having their arrival prove the truth of the message? So Popkens cleverly had the apparition say that the witnesses were actually on their way.

The two men had brought with them two others in the guise of servants, in case of emergency. As there was no longer any reason for them to retain this assumed position, they now appeared in their true light as accomplices of Popkens. This I gathered from the conversation, although my knowledge of the Magyar tongue was not sufficient to enable me to understand all that was said. It became quickly evident that they were intent upon forcing Rosicka to write the blackmailing document at once, by any means within their power.

To my intense indignation, Popkens stepped toward the girl and slapped her face. This was a bad blunder, for it set the stubborn spirit of the girl against any compromise with this gang of blackmailing desperadoes who had made her the dupe of their pretended mediumistic powers. The woman servant screamed loudly, and one of the men gagged her with the scarf from the back of the chair in which she was bound, although her screams would prove unavailing in any case, since the aged caretaker of the castle grounds was the only person within the range of her voice, and he was deaf.

I relieved my feelings by a stream of rather vigorous English, telling Popkens what I thought of a man who would strike a bound and defenseless woman. He grinned maliciously, and, coming over to the corner where I lay, he deliberately kicked me in the pit of the stomach.

By this time I had freed myself from my bonds, and sprang upon Popkens. The man with the revolver did not dare to fire, for fear of hitting Popkens, but he managed to bring down the butt of his revolver with crushing force upon my head. I was dazed for a minute, and crumpled to the floor. The men tightly bound me again, and Popkens produced from a black handbag a pair of strong handcuffs, which he locked around my wrists so tightly that they cut into the flesh.

"Mr. Handcuff King," he said to me in English, "we will see what you can do with these pretty bracelets on your wrists. You have publicly challenged anyone in Hungary to shackle you with handcuffs that you cannot pick. These, my dear sir, are not a special make, but I fear you will not get out of them as easily as you slipped out of the German police handcuffs in the jury room at Cologne. Oh yes, I know all about that. Your reputation has preceded you into Hungary."

Then, in Magyar, he ordered one of his accomplices to bring a hammer and a nail. While these were being looked for, the two servants were removed and carried to another room. Popkens, meantime, was carving a lead pencil into long strips. When the hammer was brought, he smashed the locks of the handcuffs by driving the iron nail into them, and then, withdrawing the nail, he drove the pieces of the lead pencil into the lock, plugging it tightly.

Leaving the Countess and her sister tied to the table, the five men dragged me out into the hallway, where Popkens proceeded to rip off my clothes with a sharp knife, until I was stark naked. He then searched my hair for concealed keys and lock-picks.

"I am merely playing fair with myself, Mr. Houdini," said Popkens, with the most malignant grin I have ever beheld. "I am not giving you a chance to open locks with any files or saws or picks that you may have concealed in your clothes. So you will have to excuse me if I remove your garments. I am going to introduce you to the inside of a dungeon, of which even the Countess does not know the existence. I have gone too far now to stick at putting you out of the way. But I am not going to murder you, Mr. Houdini. You will simply die of starvation, and if ever you are found, it will be years after we are gone from here, and only your bones will remain to tell the world that this was Houdini."

I struggled until I was exhausted, but my captors tied my ankles together with coarse wire, blindfolded me, and then carried me through seemingly endless passages, down a winding and damp stairway, to a musty recess at the bottom of a dungeon. Here I was dropped through a hole in the dungeon floor into a muddy cavern, and Popkens jumped down after me. Around my arms, which were already tightly handcuffed behind me, he passed a double pair of fetters that were riveted to the castle wall behind me. Then the bandage was removed from my eyes.

I lay naked on the muddy floor of the blackest, most evil-smelling cavern that it has ever been my lot to see in years of traveling in foreign countries. It was what is called an "oubliette"—a dark hole where prisoners are thrown and forgotten by the world until their skeletons are found years later.

I was not the first occupant of that dismal cavern, for Popkens had removed from the fetters a partially clothed skeleton before he clasped the gyves upon my own arms. I looked at this grisly object, lying in the mud beside me, as Popkens' lantern threw its weak rays around that terrible place, and I shuddered. Bits of mouldy clothing still clung to the bones, and the skull, which

had fallen off as Popkens' accomplices threw the skeleton to one side, stared at me out of eyeless sockets, as if grimacing in unholy glee at finding a companion after all these years. I judged, from the appearance of bits of clothing, that the skeleton was that of a girl, and indeed, some of her long hair was sticking to the wall behind me. I could feel it against the back of my neck.

Popkens kicked me in the ribs, and then climbed out of the dismal hole, assisted by one of his accomplices, who let a rope down to him. I was left in complete and terrible darkness.

Not even the Countess knew of the existence of the oubliette, Popkens had said. It must have been reached, then, through a secret passage, possibly through a hidden door. How, then, did Popkens know the passage that led to it, or even know of its existence? I remembered that the Countess recognized him as someone she had once seen at the castle in years gone by, although she could not say when or under what circumstances. Truly the man had a sinister history. His connection with the castle, and possibly with the dissolute old count, must have been far closer than the Countess suspected.

I have been in many difficult situations, but never did my prospects seem so dismal as at that moment. I have suffered worse physical tortures at Blackburn, England, where I was manacled and trussed in iron by a strong man on the stage of the Palace Theater, on October 24, 1902, and suffered brutality until my arms and wrists were torn and bleeding from the irons, of which the locks had been plugged in violation of the rules of fair play, even as they were plugged by Popkens in this instance. But in that instance I could have released myself from my tortures at any minute if I had merely admitted myself beaten instead of continuing my struggle with the irons until I finally freed myself by my own efforts. But now there seemed no way out of my tortures, as I lay naked in the mud of the oubliette, fettered to the wall, under the bed of the Maros River, in a musty cavern through the walls of which the niter was seeping.

Release from the fetters of the oubliette was not as difficult as I had feared, but my plugged handcuffs held my wrists rigidly, and the flesh was swelling beneath the cruel bite of the steel, making it doubly difficult to extricate myself. However, having released my arms from the wall, I felt more comfortable, and was enabled to disentangle my ankles from the wire that bound them. I could not climb out of the oubliette with my hands shackled behind me, but I resorted to an old trick—I bent forward and doubled my legs until I was able to loop my fettered arms around my feet and bring my hands, still shackled, in front of me.

Then fell to me a grisly task, which I think I would not care to repeat for the combined fortunes of Rockefeller and Henry Ford. My captors, after all their precautions to remove all clothing and everything that might serve to pick a lock, had overlooked the human skeleton that lay beside me in the oubliette. I knelt on the skeleton and splintered the ribs. Indeed it was with a bone broken from the skeleton by my feet that I was able to open the gyves that fettered me to the wall, and this was not so difficult as might be supposed, after I had solved the problem of how to get hold of the bone and manipulate it. This required a good deal of contortionistic skill, but was easy as compared with the task of opening the locks of the handcuffs that had been plugged with wood and mashed with a nail.

In my long and adventurous career I have never failed to open a lock, but this was not a legitimate test, any more than the test on the stage at Blackburn was legitimate. I had succeeded there, but it seemed as if I was facing utter failure here. I got the wooden plugging out of one of the cuffs, when the fear seized me that the false spiritualists might return to murder me. Popkens, as I had learned from his remark about my escape from handcuffs at Cologne knew that I had opened the best locks of the German police, and he might conceivably be struck with the possibility that I could escape also from his manacles, plugged though they were.

I climbed out of the oubliette into the dungeon above it, unlocked the massive door of the dungeon (which was easy work as compared to opening some of the locks in American jails), and stepped out into a damp passageway. A ray of light wavered along the passageway, and I sprang back into the dungeon, just in time to avoid discovery. I nearly fell back into the oubliette in my haste. True enough, they had sent a man back to put an end to me. He raised his lantern and threw its rays through the barred square in the upper part of the massive dungeon door. I crouched directly beneath the opening, and he failed to see me.

I heard him fumble with the lock, and he opened the door hesitatingly, surprised to find that the key turned so easily. His back was toward me as he set down the lantern. In his right hand he held a revolver, with which he evidently intended to shoot me. I sprang upon his back, looping my handcuffed arms over his head, and bent his head back. Although my wrists were manacled, I had the advantage which attaches to surprise. I got him under me, and pressed my knee into his throat. I was choking him into insensibility when part of the dungeon floor gave way, precipitating him head first into the oubliette, out of which I had climbed a minute before. The lantern crashed into the opening and went out, leaving us both in darkness. I groped my way out into the passage, feeling my way up step by step, for I feared hidden holes and trap-doors that might drop me into the Maros River.

I ascended a long, winding stairway, and finally saw a dim light ahead of me, and came out into a gloomy corridor in the upper part of the castle. True enough, the dungeons were reached by a hidden panel, which had been left open by the man who had just gone down to kill me. I closed it, and admired the absolute skill with which it was concealed. But the Countess and her sister Rosicka were in the power of Popkens and his unscrupulous companions, who were perhaps torturing them into giving them the document that the blackmailers wanted, and my own position was precarious, so I had little time to admire the skill of construction of that panel.

I must get away, remove my manacles, get some clothes, and summon help. I climbed out of a window in the castle tower and began to descend the wall in the fading twilight, manacled though I was. Then I remembered that in my eagerness to reach safety I had neglected to lock the door into the dungeon above the oubliette. This was the mistake that nearly cost me my life.

This Remarkable Adventure of Houdini Will Be Concluded in the Next Issue of WEIRD TALES.

THE TOAD

(*Continued from page 53*)

its sightless eyes met mine. The grisly jaws sagged open as if to speak.

Then from beneath the skull, jauntily stepped the toad. It fixed me with a burning look of hatred. Turning to the police like a lawyer addressing a jury, and nodding sidewise at me, it made many strange sounds—sounds which were too well understood. At last the toad paused and waited expectantly as for a verdict. Comprehension stole over the faces of the police, and the toad swelled with satisfaction. Then, with one final and dreadful croak of vengeance, the toad sank to my feet, its life gone out.

I turned to the police and noted their silent question.

"Arrest me," I replied. "Yes, I killed my master!"

CREATURES OF THE NIGHT

(*Continued from page 74*)

cradled as the vast masses of the ocean bed imperceptibly rose and fell.

Once I "came to," and seeing nothing in the darkness, I pressed my fingers close to my eyes. They were warm and smelled salty. They were covered with sticky blood, whether my own or that of another, I could not tell.

One morning—months later, as I soon found out—I awoke to find that the sun was streaming in through the half-open window and the curtains were making fluttering patterns of light on the bedspread. Some people came in, and I tried to tell them exactly what I had witnessed and been through, but they only looked pained and disturbed. I was surprised to find the weather so very warm and at last discovered that the summer was well advanced into August.

One day a class-mate, of whom I was very fond, came to see me and I told him what had happened. He listened quietly and sympathetically to what I said.

"But, take it from me," he commented, "they will keep you locked up here just as long as you think and talk about that. You and I know how strange and how evil those vile beings are that come abroad at intervals in the night. But I advise you to do all you can to forget them and say nothing more about them to anybody."

I have kept his advice. Few besides yourself have ever heard me speak of it. But I am just as sure tonight, years afterward, as I am of these books and bottles, that what I saw and felt that night really exists.

MASTERPIECES OF WEIRD FICTION

(Continued from page 79)

was not very high, like Mr. Lord's—nor yet very low, like that of Mr. Lord's reviewers, but upon the whole I made sure that he would clear it. And then what if he did not?—ah, that was the question—what if he did not? "What right," said I, "had the old gentleman to make any other gentleman jump? The little old dot-and-carry-one! who is *he?* If he asks *me* to jump, I don't do it, that's flat, and I don't care who *the devil he is.*" The bridge, as I say, was arched and covered in, in a very ridiculous manner, and there was a most uncomfortable echo about it at all times—an echo which I never before so particularly observed as when I uttered the four last words of my remark.

But what I said, or what I thought, or what I heard, occupied only an instant. In less than five seconds from his starting, my poor Toby had taken the leap. I saw him run nimbly, and spring grandly from the floor of the bridge, cutting the most awful flourishes with his legs as he went up. I saw him high in the air, pigeon-winging it to admiration just over the top of the stile; and, of course, I thought it an unusually singular thing that he did not *continue* to go over. But the whole leap was the affair of a moment, and, before I had a chance to make any profound reflections, down came Mr. Dammit on the flat of his back, on the same side of the stile from which he had started. In the same instant I saw the old gentleman limping off at the top of his speed, having caught and wrapped up in his apron something that fell heavily into it from the darkness of the arch just over the turnstile. At all this I was much astonished; but I had no leisure to think, for Mr. Dammit lay particularly still, and I concluded that his feelings had been hurt, and that he stood in need of my assistance. I hurried up to him and found that he had received what might be termed a serious injury. The truth is, he had been deprived of his head, which after a close search I could not find anywhere—so I determined to take him home, and send for the homœopathists. In the meantime a thought struck me, and I threw open an adjacent window of the bridge; when the sad truth flashed upon me at once. About five feet just above the top of the turnstile, and crossing the arch of the foot-path so as to constitute a brace, there extended a flat iron bar, lying with its breadth horizontally, and forming one of a series that served to strengthen the structure throughout its extent. With the edge of this brace it appeared evident that the neck of my unfortunate friend had come precisely in contact.

He did not long survive his terrible loss. The homœopathists did not give him little enough physic, and what little they did give him he hesitated to take. So in the end he grew worse, and at length died, a lesson to all riotous livers. I bedewed his grave with my tears, worked a *bar* sinister on his family escutcheon, and for the general expenses of his funeral, sent in my very moderate bill to the transcendentalists. The scoundrels refused to pay it, so I had Mr. Dammit dug up at once, and sold him for dog's meat.

"Why don't you write some problem novels?"

"I can't think of any novel problems."—Boston Transcript.

THE HOUSE IN THE FOREST

(*Continued from page 77*)

lowing day, after it had killed the farmer's wife.

Fearing the anger of his outraged neighbors, he kept his own counsel, chaining the creature up until such a time as he could dispose of it. My presence in the house led the old people to go to its room to make doubly sure that it was properly secured.

The crazed animal—man, or whatever it may be called—had attacked the old woman. Lang, rushing to her assistance, lost his own life as I have described.

When she had completed her story, I again sought the outdoors, preferring the storm to another hour under the roof of tragedy. Before morning broke the storm abated and I finally ran into a party of searchers organized by Brayton who, alarmed by my prolonged absence, had started into the forest in search of my body, believing that I, too, had fallen a victim to the murderer.

The people didn't merely look at Prof. Branefog—they stared. He knew he was absentminded at times, and he wondered whether he had rubbed his face with boot polish instead of cold cream after he had shaved, or whether he had forgotten to change his dressing gown for his frock coat.

But a kindly policeman put things right.

"Are you aware, sir, that you are carrying a joint of beef in your arms?" he asked.

"Goodness me!" said the professor. "I knew something was wrong. My wife told me to put her Sunday hat on the bed, to place this joint in the oven, and to take the baby and the dog for a walk."

"You've not put the baby in the oven, surely?" said the policeman.

"I put something in it," said Branefog: "but I don't know whether it was the baby or the dog!"

With bated breath they hurried to the professor's house. Here, on the bed, lay the baby and the dog; but it was just as bad for Branefog. It was his wife's Sunday hat that was in the oven!

The traveler had returned to his native village after being abroad for twenty years. He stopped as he saw a little boy with a small baby coming down the road.

"Ah! a new face, I see!"

"No, it isn't, sir," replied the boy, looking at the baby. "It's just been washed, that's all!"

THE EYRIE

ASK HOUDINI

HOUDINI, Master of Escape, authority on the subject of spiritualistic and psychic phenomena and creator of the weird and mysterious, will answer through the columns of this magazine any rational question that is deemed of general interest to our readers. No attention will be paid to questions regarding the solution of feats generally performed by Houdini but he will attempt to offer a scientific and logical explanation of any phenomena you may have witnessed or encountered in your private life. Questions dealing with spiritualistic phenomena will be carefully answered provided they are of general interest. No questions regarding public performances of magic, hypnotism, etc., will be answered and no attention will be paid to communications without the name and address of the writer. All letters will be treated with strict confidence and will not appear in print with the name of the writer unless desired. All correspondence should be typewritten if possible and be addressed to Houdini, care of WEIRD TALES, 854 N. Clark St., Chicago.

THE name, "Houdini," has long been synonymous throughout the world with such words as "uncanny" and "supernatural." Indeed, so widely known is Houdini's name, that it appears in this connection in Funk & Wagnalls' Dictionary.

Houdini emphatically does not believe in occult superstitions, and he probably would deny, just as vigorously, that his miraculous escapes from prison cells and handcuffs are aided by disembodied "spirits"—as so many believe they are. And yet there is no denying that many of his amazing exploits smack of the supernatural. No wonder his name is associated with things that cannot be explained!

His strange adventures in the far corners of the world are as hair-raising, as uncanny and as deeply absorbing as the fiction we have published in WEIRD TALES. Wherefore, mindful of what our readers like, we proposed to Houdini that he select from his vast store of experiences a particularly thrilling adventure and tell our readers about it.

He acquiesced—and the first installment of his extraordinary article appears in this issue of WEIRD TALES. You probably have read it before turning back here to read The Eyrie; and we think you will agree with us that it's one of the most interesting things we've ever published.

Unless we're grievously mistaken, you will like the second and final installment still better. Terrifying, to say the least, were Houdini's adventures in that underground torture chamber, but more terrifying still are the things that follow. In the April issue of WEIRD TALES the Houdini article will be concluded, and we can promise you that you'll feel well repaid for having read the rest of it.

We recommend that you order the April issue early. Tell your newsdealer to save a copy for you. There is likely to be an unprecedented demand for it; and you will feel chagrined if the salesman says, in response to your belated request, "We're all out of April WEIRD TALES."

We also suggest that you miss none of our forthcoming issues. This Houdini article, remember, is only the first of a series. More will follow. Watch for them.

And right here, while we're talking about ourselves and boasting of what we're going to do, we may as well announce that at last we're preparing to publish "The Upper Berth" by F. Marion Crawford. This is the story that so many of our readers—scores of them—have asked us to run in the "Masterpieces of Weird Fiction" department. We encountered some trouble in finding the story, but we finally discovered it, and now we are negotiating with the publishers for the right to reprint it.

We read the story through again and were pleased to find that it had lost none of its charm. We followed the "creepy" experiences of Mr. Crawford's sailor with the ghastly occupant of the upper berth as zestfully as when we first read the story, years and years ago.

We expect to publish "The Upper Berth" in our April issue.

WE think we've said enough about that April issue, and now we shall talk of other matters. Suppose we discuss the poets? Since we began using verse in WEIRD TALES we have been bombarded with all manner of poetry, and most of it has been pretty bad, but occasionally something turns up in the mail that is really unusual. For instance, take this one from James F. Morton, Jr., of New York City. Mr. Morton accompanied his poem with a note, reading thus:

"Dear Mr. Baird: You are advancing from better to better, as the current WEIRD TALES shows. I am more than ever glad to do all I can to promote its circulation.

"I am glad to note that you will include poetry in future issues; and you begin well in the present one. I enclose an aspirant for admission. Please don't think I flatter you to gain acceptance for the offspring of my own brain; for I credit you with the sound and independent judgment to disregard personal considerations in weighing the merits of contributions offered. If you shoot this back to me, it won't make me a whit the less a booster for your magazine. If you accept it, I can't think more highly of W. T. than I already do; and I shall certainly not be likely to think less of it on that account! So take it or decline it; and we are friends in just the same degree."

Having printed the note, we shall now print the poem, though not because of the flattering things the note says of us. This poem strikes a weird chord that seems in harmony with our

style. It is called "Haunted Houses," and here it is:

Haunted houses, haunted houses! I can see them in my sleep.
Hints of dark, unhallowed orgies make my flesh begin to creep.
Sudden lights at darkened windows, knocking on the floors and walls,
Sounds of wild, unearthly moaning, phantom touches, mystic calls,
Rattling chains and groans of anguish, charnel odors, shrieks of fear,
Rustling gowns and stealthy footfalls, candles dimmed and peril near,
Clashing swords and falling corpses, steps upon the creaking stair,
Chairs upset and toppling tables, thrills of terror everywhere,
Bed by ghostly fingers shaken, bedclothes plucked by unseen hands,
Lamplight suddenly extinguished, as the unknown Will commands,
Words of ghastly import whispered, noises of no mortal source,
Frightful knowledge of the presence of a dire, resistless force,
Faces in the darkened corners, forms beyond all speech uncouth,
Eld unreverend and loathsome, hell-marked childhood, sin-stained youth,
Bullet holes in pallid foreheads, bleeding breasts and throats agape,
Eyes in dreadful frenzy rolling, lips with mow of demon-ape,
Bony hands that slowly, sternly beckon, though no word is said,
Till we needs must rise and follow, at the bidding of the Dead,
While our ghastly leader ever moves with spectral glide before,
Till we gain the place that covers foul or nameless deed of yore;
Ever striving to our vision some grim secret to disclose,
That the task may be accomplished, which shall bring at last repose.
If we win, a soul is ransomed; if we falter, all is lost;
If we fail to read the secret, we must pay the fearful cost.
For the wight who rashly enters, looms the madhouse or the tomb;
Venture not in haunted houses, lest you meet a fearful doom.

While we're at it, we shall do a thorough job by offering you another. This second poem comes from Edna Bell Seward of Highland Park, Ill. Miss Seward submits

THE MURDERER

Night is the time to drink the wine
Of sleep—it conscience frees;
But a guilty soul must quaff the bowl
That's full of bitter lees.
It's brewed in hell where devils dwell
—I drink its loathsome rue—
Then every hour my senses cower
And writhe the whole night through.

My murd'rous hands are once more spanned
Around my victim's throat;
His cries I hear of mortal fear
While round me devils gloat;
Upon my breast with leering jest
REMORSE lays heavily—
And all too late I see the gate
Of hell awaiting me.

To God I pray to bring the day—
While Furies 'round me scream—
Pray for an hour from their power
In sleep—that has no dream.
Night is the time to drink the wine
Of sleep—it conscience frees;
But a guilty soul must quaff a bowl
That's full of bitter lees.

THAT will be all for the poets today. Now for the short prose pieces—to wit, those vox pop letters so dear to the heart of ye faithful ed. Walter F. McCanless of Reidsville, N. C., has a number of things to say about us, not all of them particularly flattering, and for this reason we offer his letter first, exactly as he wrote it:

"Dear Mr. Baird: I realize that this letter is going to be longer than a strictly business letter should be, for I wish to say a number of things. Before I take up the different points that I wish to make, however, I wish to say that I continue to read with great pleasure and thrills the stories that appear from time to time in WEIRD TALES. In fact, I usually read this magazine from cover to cover, including most of the advertisements. I have been particularly interested in the Eyrie department, in that it affords a sort of key to the likes and dislikes of the reading public. I find myself agreeing in large measure with the majority.

"Particularly do I agree with those who have denominated 'The Autobiography of a Blue Ghost' a 'miserable failure,' from the standpoint of humor, and 'silly.' If I understand literature, the imagination should not go beyond the bounds of verisimilitude, or likeness to truth. Where truth is an unknown quantity, as is the case with ghosts, the conventional notions should not be transcended. In this respect the author sinned against the conventions in his very title, for who ever heard of a *blue* ghost? I happen to live in the south where the conventions in this particular line have been inbred by the old-fashioned colored southern 'Mammy'. They all agree that the ghosts are white, misty, or wraithlike. And this brings me to the first point of my letter.

"If you are really in earnest about the publication of 'The Transparent Ghost', my vote is DON'T. Aside from the other qualities which the story, if it is in keeping with the letter, must have, the title is against it. If a writer must not transcend the conventions, in his imagination, he must also not be guilty of the 'self-evident'. Most ghosts, according to the standardized notion, *are* transparent. The title, therefore, falls flat. But this is not the only consideration.

"The other qualities, apparent in the letter, would make a farce of your magazine. Writers could never be sure whether their contributions were accepted by you for the artistic merit such contributions contained, or for the laugh or amusement that you wished to afford your readers. Those having the desire to develop into good writers of fiction are usually serious, take their work in a serious manner, and hate to be laughed at. You would find that the 'Unique Magazine' was deteriorating, for lack of material, into a travesty of the type of story it started with.

"We, of the South, believe in Edgar Allan Poe. To have it said of one that 'He writes like Poe' is, to our minds, the highest compliment that can be paid one. (By the way, 'The Crawling Death' by P. A. Connelly is, in my opinion, equal, for thrills, to anything Poe ever wrote.) We, therefore, should hate to see a publication parody his best known style of writing. Poe, however, attempted humor of a sort (example, 'Why the Frenchman Wears His Arm in a Sling'), but with no very great degree of success, since he is best known for horror and mystery stories. To see these parodied by a publication would result in making such a publication taboo in the South. We turn to joke books that do not hurt our pride. I have felt honored by your acceptance of my mite, and have felt a partnership-interest, consequently, in the success of WEIRD TALES. I want it to succeed, for its success in a large measure means my success. If you perpetrate what you contemplate I and others like me will wonder how much 'fun'

(Continued on page 86)

Are You Afraid To Love?

Is Sex a Mystery To You?

Has true love come into your life — or didn't you recognize it when it came? Are you afraid now of the baffling, perplexing mysteries of sex relationship? Are you discontented with the stupid lies and furtive ashamed answers the world gives you in place of the naked, fearless truth you desire? Do you want some safe, sane, unashamed advice on sex questions? Do you hesitate asking your doctor certain questions? Then clip the coupon below, send it today without any money and in a few days you will receive the most startling surprise of your life.

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Life's Mysteries Revealed

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How pitifully often do we hear this pathetic phrase. Glorious young lives are wrecked by ignorance and falsehood. Innocent children suffer as a result of prudishness and "modesty." We think we are an enlightened, civilized people—but we will continue to be in the dark ages until every adult knows the truth about the functions and purposes of his body, and about that great powerful invisible force, the Life Urge.

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—Signs of excesses?
—What every girl should know?
—The reasons for marital unhappiness?
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—Ethics of the unmarried?
—What every young man should know?
—Advice to expectant mothers?

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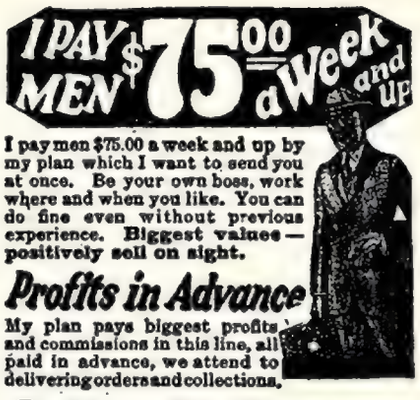
(*Continued from page* 84)

you saw and wanted others to see in our contributions.

"The other point that I wished to make, if I may in view of the aforesaid partnership-interest, is this: A serial story is, in my opinion, from the standpoint of artistry, a failure. This is especially true of the type of story WEIRD TALES stands for. Poe was the first to point out that impressionistic and mystery stories must be short. He held that no story that could not be read at one sitting could sustain the impression it started out to make. The interval between the first and second sitting is, however short it may be, sufficient to modify one's outlook upon life. Therefore the reader brings to bear upon the reading at the second sitting an additional wealth of ideas and experiences that he lacked at the first sitting. The unity of impression is destroyed. A serial is a failure in another respect.

"In this day of news-stands, when one does not have to subscribe to magazines, when one may examine first what he is about to buy, the magazine that has the 'continued-in-our-next' type of story is for the most part left upon the shelves. Where one is intrigued into buying a two-part story, he finds that the second part lacks the thrill of the first part; for he naturally expects a climax, which does not materialize owing to his modified mental content, and these two things, anticipation and disappointment, make him feel that the publisher has sold him a barrel of apples with the big ones at the top. For instance, the thrill in 'The Damned Thing' was acute in the first part. In the second part this thrill not only failed to grow, but there was an apparent 'marking time' feeling. In the third part there is felt a decline of interest even upon the part of the writer, and the denouement is not in keeping with the incidents of the story. According to the writer, 'The Damned Thing' had color that rendered it invisible. When one reflects what color is and is told that the monster was invisible in the twilight of the street lights, in the darkness of the reporter's room, and the glare of the morning sun, it is asking too much of him to expect him to accept the solution, unless the writer implied that his monster was a sort of chameleon with varying shades of invisible color. The story is a disappointment in that it did not keep the promise of its first part. I, therefore, vote for no more serials of impressionistic type.

(*Continued on page* 89)



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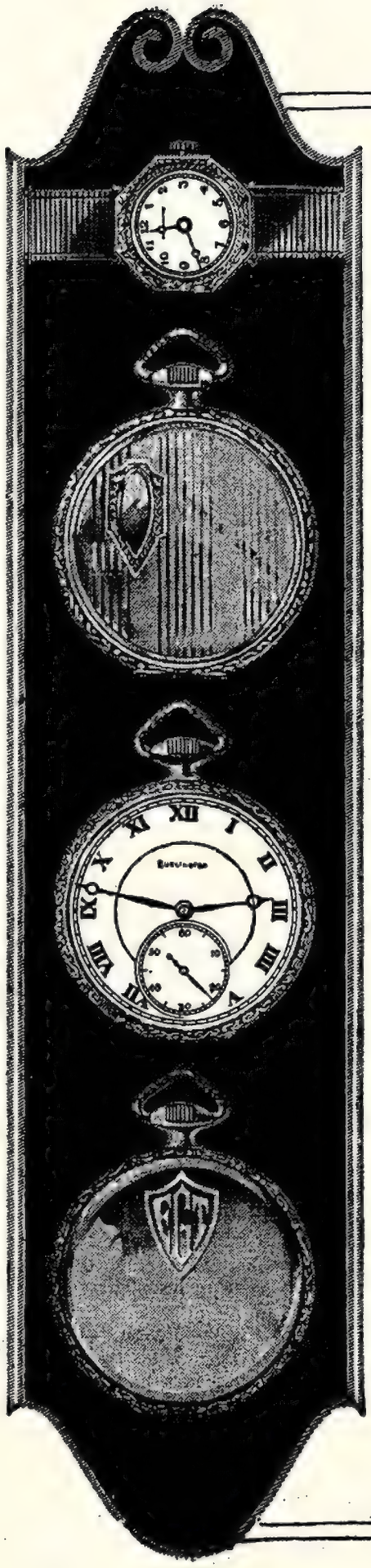

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Finding "The Fountain of Youth"

A Long-Sought Secret, Vital to Happiness, Has Been Discovered.

By H. M. Stunz

Alas! that spring should vanish with the rose!
That youth's sweet-scented manuscript should close!
—Omar Khayyam.

A SECRET vital to human happiness has been discovered. An ancient problem which, sooner or later, affects the welfare of virtually every man and woman, has been solved. As this problem undoubtedly will come to you eventually, if it has not come already, I urge you to read this article carefully. It may give you information of a value beyond all price.

This newly-revealed secret is not a new "philosophy" of financial success. It is not a political panacea. It has to do with something of far greater moment to the individual—success and happiness in love and marriage—and there is nothing theoretical, imaginative or fantastic about it, because it comes from the coldly exact realms of science and its value has been proved. It "works." And because it does work—surely, speedily and most delightfully—it is one of the most important discoveries made in many years. Thousands already bless it for having rescued them from lives of disappointment and misery. Millions will rejoice because of it in years to come.

The peculiar value of this discovery is that it removes physical handicaps which, in the past, have been considered inevitable and irremediable. I refer to the loss of youthful animation and a waning of the vital forces. These difficulties have caused untold unhappiness—failures, shattered romances, mysterious divorces. True happiness does not depend on wealth, position or fame. Primarily, it is a matter of health. Not the inefficient, "half-alive" condition which ordinarily passes as "health," but the abundant, vibrant, magnetic vitality of superb manhood and womanhood.

Unfortunately, this kind of health is rare. Our civilization, with its wear and tear, rapidly depletes the organism and, in a physical sense, old age comes on when life should be at its prime.

But this is not a tragedy of our era alone. Ages ago a Persian poet, in the world's most melodious epic of pessimism, voiced humanity's immemorial complaint that "spring should vanish with the rose" and the song of youth too soon come to an end. And for centuries before Omar Khayyam wrote his immortal verses, science had searched—and in the centuries that have passed since then has continued to search—without halt, for the fabled "fountain of youth," an infallible method of renewing energy lost or depleted by disease, overwork, worry, excesses or advancing age.

Now the long search has been rewarded. A "fountain of youth" has been found! Science announces unconditionally that youthful vigor can be restored quickly and safely. Lives clouded by weakness can be illumined by the sunlight of health and joy. Old age, in a sense, can be kept at bay and youth made more glorious than ever. And the discovery which makes these amazing results possible is something any man or woman, young or old, can easily use in the privacy of the home, unknown to relative, friend or acquaintance.

The discovery had its origin in famous European laboratories. Brought to America, it was developed into a product that has given most remarkable results in thousands of cases, many of which had defied all other treatments. In scientific circles the discovery has been known and used for several years and has caused unbounded amazement by its quick, harmless, gratifying action. Now in convenient tablet form, under the name of Korex compound, it is available to the general public.

Any one who finds the youthful stamina ebbing, life losing its charm and color or the feebleness of old age coming on too soon, can obtain a double-strength treatment of this compound, sufficient for ordinary cases, under a positive guarantee that it costs nothing if it fails and only $2 if it produces prompt and gratifying results. In average cases, the compound often brings about amazing benefits in from twenty-four to forty-eight hours.

Simply write in confidence to the Melton Laboratories, 834 Massachusetts Bldg., Kansas City, Mo., and this wonder restorative will be mailed to you in a plain wrapper. You may enclose $2 or, if you prefer, just send your name without money and pay the postman $2 and postage when the parcel is delivered. In either case, if you report after a week that the Korex compound has not given satisfactory results, your money will be refunded immediately. The Melton Laboratories are nationally known and thoroughly reliable. Moreover, their offer is fully guaranteed, so no one need hesitate to accept it. If you need this remarkable scientific rejuvenator, write for it today.

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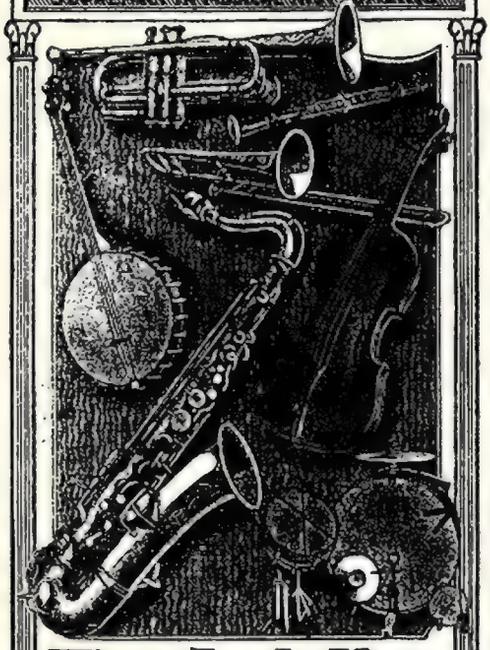

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(Continued from page 86)

"I know your patience is wholly exhausted by this time, and I close."

WE subscribe to Mr. McCanless' opening sentence and his view of Poe, but we disagree with his opinion of "The Transparent Ghost." That story HAD to be printed. It fairly howled for printer's ink, and we couldn't deny its plea. We shall have more to say of this story next month.

Meanwhile, let us consider the following from H. P. Lovecraft, who has contributed a good deal to these sprightly pages. Mr. Lovecraft writes:

"My dear Baird: I was indeed glad to receive yours of the 14th, and to learn that your readers are taking kindly to my tenebrous effusions, as represented by 'Dagon'. I hope they'll like its successors as well—for I can certainly give them all you think they'll take! That 'The Hound' merits your favour is pleasing news to me. I wrote it a year ago in New York, when I had been exploring an old Dutch cemetery in Flatbush, where the ancient gravestones are in the Dutch language, with such beginnings as 'Hier Lydt' or 'Hier leght begraaven'. My companion was Rheinhart Kleiner, (whose verse you may have seen in some of the popular magazines) and when we picked some scaling red slate from one of the slabs as souvenirs, I wondered what *thing* might come to us some midnight to punish us for the wanton desecration.

"And here is another horror for your approval or rejection. This thing—whose long title you can shorten to 'The Late Arthur Jermyn' if the original presents typographical problems—was written about two years ago. Its origin is rather curious—and far removed from the atmosphere it suggests. Somebody had been harassing me into reading some work of the iconoclastic moderns—those young chaps who pry behind exteriors and unveil nasty hidden motives and secret stigmata—and I had nearly fallen asleep over the tame backstairs gossip of Anderson's 'Winesburg, Ohio'. The sainted Sherwood, as you know, laid bare the dark arcana which many whited village lives concealed; and it occurred to me that I, in my weirder medium, could probably devise some secret behind a man's ancestry which would make the worst of Anderson's disclosures sound like the annual report of a Sabbath School. Hence Arthur Jermyn. Most of those who have seen the MS. profess themselves properly horrified—all, in fact, except one chap who has traveled in

(Continued on page 90)

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Send today for the special patented Free Trial package which contains a trial bottle of my Restorer and full instructions for making the convincing test on one lock of hair. Indicate color of hair with X. Print name and address plainly. If possible, enclose a lock of your hair in your letter.

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(*Continued from page* 89)

Rhodesia, and declares himself bound by ties of the purest and most undaunted affection to all the denizens, negro and simian alike, of the Dark Continent.

"Popular authors do not and apparently cannot appreciate the fact that true art is obtainable only by rejecting normality and conventionality in toto, and approaching a theme purged utterly of any usual or preconceived point of view. Wild and 'different' as they may consider their quasi-weird products, it remains a fact that the bizarrerie is on the surface alone; and that basically they reiterate the same old conventional values and motives and perspectives. Good and evil, teleological illusion, sugary sentiment, anthropocentric psychology—the usual superficial stock in trade, and all shot through with the eternal and inescapable commonplace. Take a werewolf story, for instance—who ever wrote one from the point of view of the wolf, and sympathizing strongly with the devil to whom he has sold himself? Who ever wrote a story from the point of view that man is a blemish on the cosmos, which ought to be eradicated? As an example—a young man I know lately told me that he means to write a story about a scientist who wishes to dominate the earth, and who to accomplish his ends trains and overdevelops germs, (a la Anthony Rud's 'Ooze') and leads on armies of them in the manner of the Egyptian plagues. I told him that although this theme has promise, it is made utterly commonplace by assigning the scientist a normal motive. There is nothing outre about wanting to conquer the earth; Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, and Wilhelm II wanted to do that. Instead, I told my friend, he should conceive a man with a morbid, frantic, shuddering hatred of the life-principle itself, who wishes to extirpate from the planet every trace of biological organism, animal and vegetable alike, including himself. That would be tolerably original. But after all, originality lies within the author. One can't write a weird story of real power without perfect psychological detachment from the human scene, and a magic prism of imagination which suffuses theme and style alike with that grotesquerie and disquieting distortion characteristic of morbid vision. Only a cynic can create a horror—for behind every masterpiece of the sort must reside a driving, dæmonic force that despises the human race and illusions, and longs to pull them to pieces and mock them. This is true in even greater degree of pictorial artists— I

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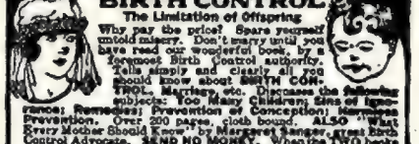

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wish you could get a staff of Clark Ashton Smiths to illustrate WEIRD TALES! The normal artist has conventional conceptions of line and detail, light and shade; but the macabre genius has the magic prism, and sees the world in that leeringly twisted, mockingly decorative light which gives rise to the achievements of an Aubrey Beardsley, Sidney Sime, John Martin, Gustave Dore, or—immortal of immortals—Francisco Goya y Lucientes. I wish you could get some illustrations and cover designs from Clark Ashton Smith himself—even though he isn't doing so much in that line lately as he used to do. He lacks technical assurance, but has the lurid vision to an abnormal degree.

"I find Eddy rather a delight—I wish I had known him before. Next Sunday we are going on a trip which may bring you echoes in the form of horror-tales from both participants. In the northwestern part of Rhode Island there is a remote village called Chepachet, reached by a single car line with only a few cars a day. Last week Eddy was there for the first time, and at the post office overheard a conversation between two ancient rustic farmers which inspired our coming expedition. They were discussing hunting prospects, and spoke of the migration of all the rabbits and squirrels across the line into Connecticut; when one told the other that there were plenty left in the *Dark Swamp*. Then ensued a description to which Eddy listened with the utmost avidity, and which brought out the fact that in this, the smallest and most densely populated state of the Union, there exists a tract of 160 acres which has never been fully penetrated by any living man. It lies two miles from Chepachet—in a direction we do not now know, but which we will ascertain Sunday—and is reputed to be the home of very strange animals—strange at least to this part of the world, and including the dreaded 'bobcat', whose half-human cries in the night are often heard by neighboring farmers. The reason it has never been fully penetrated is that there are many treacherous potholes, and that the archaic trees grow so thickly together that passage is well-nigh impossible. The undergrowth is very thick, and even at midday the darkness is very deep because of the intertwined branches overhead. The description so impressed Eddy that he began writing a story about it—provisionally entitled 'Black Noon'—on the trolley ride home. And now we are both to see it . . . we are both to go into that

(*Continued on page 92*)

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RIGHT NOW, today, I offer you an opportunity to be your own boss—to work just as many hours a day as you please—to start when you want to and quit when you want to—and earn $200 a week.

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Does that sound too good to be true? If it does, then let me tell you what J. R. Head did in a small town in Kansas. Head lives in a town of 631 people. He was sick, broke, out of a job. He accepted my offer. I gave him the same chance I am now offering you. At this new work he has made as high as $69.50 for one day's work.

You can do every bit as well as he did. If that isn't enough, then let me tell you about E. A. Sweet of Michigan. He was an electrical engineer and didn't know anything about selling. In his first month's spare time he earned $243. Inside of six months he was making between $600 and $1,200 a month.

W. J. McCrary is another man I want to tell you about. His regular job paid him $2.00 a day, but this wonderful new work has enabled him to make $9,000 a year.

Yes, and right this very minute you are being offered the same proposition that has made these men so successful. Do you want it? Do you want to earn $40.00 a day?

J. R. HEAD

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Now, Comer Coats are not sold in stores. All our orders come through our own representatives. Within the next few months we will pay representatives more than three hundred thousand dollars for sending us orders.

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You can see how simple it is. We furnish you with a complete outfit and tell you how to get the business in your territory. We help you to get started. If you send us only six average orders a day, which you can easily get, you will make $100 a week.

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Well, here is your chance to find out, for this is the same proposition that enabled George Garon to make a clear profit of $40.00 in his first day's work—the same proposition that gave R. W. Krieger $20.00 net profit in a half hour. It is the same opportunity that gave A. B. Spencer $625 cash for one month's spare time.

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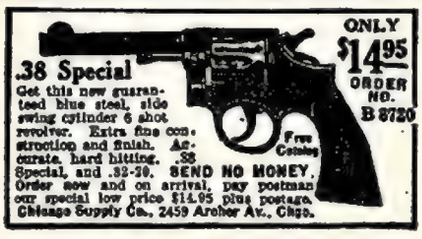

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(*Continued from page* 91)

swamp . . . and *perhaps* to come out of it. Probably the thing'll turn out to be a clump of ill-nourished bushes, a few rain-puddles, and a couple of sparrows —but until our disillusion we are at liberty to think of the place as the immemorial lair of nightmare and unknown evil ruled by that subterraneous horror that sometimes cranes its neck out of the deepest potholes . . . It."

REVERTING to the matter of "The Transparent Ghost," we have just added to our collection of letters, heartily endorsing the story, communications from Dr. Henry C. Murphy of Brooklyn, Mrs. Claud Amoe of Detroit, Richard James Credicott of Freeport, Ill., Robert C. Old of Corona, L. I., Gordon

(*Continued on page* 94)

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I will tell you FREE Under which Zodiac Sign were you born? What are your opportunities in life, your future prospects, happiness in marriage, friends, enemies, success in all undertakings and many other vital questions as indicated by ASTROLOGY, the most ancient and interesting science of history?

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Simply send me the exact date of your birth in your own handwriting. To cover cost of this notice and postage, enclose ten cents in any form and your exact name and address. Your astrological interpretation will be written in plain language and sent to you securely sealed and postpaid. A great surprise awaits you!

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You press the button, drop card in developer and in one minute take out a perfect, finished post card photo 2½x3¼ inches in size. Camera, itself, is about 4½x5x7 inches. Loads in daylight 10 to 50 post cards at one time.

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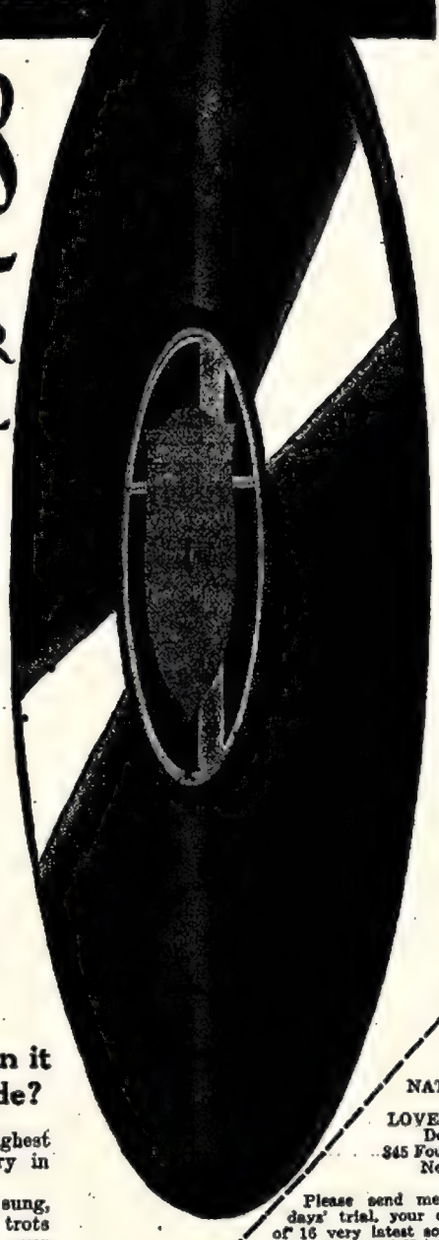

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These Great New Song Successes

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- Ciribiribin

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- When It's Night Time in Italy, It's Wednesday Over Here
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(*Continued from page 92*)

Dewey of Primrose, Nebraska, and a dozen or so others from other places.

We wish we had space for all of them here (to say nothing of the eighty-odd letters to the Editor that have been crowded out of this issue), but the best we can do is to quote a paragraph from Mr. Dewey's letter, which is fairly typical of the rest:

"By all means publish 'The Transparent Ghost.' It must truly be a marvellous tale if it is possible to read it forward or backward, and still fully understand it. That is the outstanding deficiency in other stories: that it is impossible to read them in more than one way, and still fathom their meaning. And reflect well upon what it would mean to the reading public to lose such a gem of literature."

At any rate, we've done our duty. The gem hasn't been lost.

THE EDITOR.

DEAD LETTERS YIELD $30.00.

The amount realized from a sale of articles from New York's dead letter office recently was over $30.00.

Mr. Wombat insisted on his wife's ordering ice cream every day. Some days he ate it and some days he didn't touch it. His wife had argued the question of having it every day, but he was firm. So she asked his chum to put in a word. After some hesitation this gentleman did so, and then Mr. Wombat explained his position.

"Ice cream," he stated, "is a dish that I like to have on the table. You eat it or you don't eat it. In either case that ends the transaction. They can't warm it over."

Night was coming on, the storm was increasing and some of the deck fittings had already been swept overboard, when the captain decided to send up a distress signal.

The rocket was already lit and about to ascend when a solemn passenger spoke.

"Captain," said he, "I'd be the last man on earth to cast a damper on any man's high spirits, but it seems to me this is no time for letting off fireworks."

"What do you think of that tower for height?" asked the Londoner. "Waal, now," said Cyrus T. Ruth of New York, "do you call that high? Say, in our ninety-first story bedrooms we always have to close the windows at night to keep the clouds from rolling in."

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read numbers on freight cars mile away and see mountains on the moon." A. C. Palmer, Indianola

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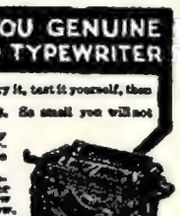

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The handwriting of Horace Greeley, the journalist, was so bad that at one time there was only one compositor in the newspaper office who could set up his copy. This man seemed to his fellows unduly puffed up by the fact.

One day while the supercompositor was out a bird that had flown into the office walked into some printing ink and then on to a number of loose sheets lying on the floor. These sheets were placed on the absent compositor's desk and when he returned he proceeded to set up the supposed "copy." Presently he jibbed at a word and went and asked Greeley what it was.

"Why," Greeley shouted, "any fool could see what it is. It's unconstitutional."

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Critic—"I congratulate them on their success."

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Can You Guess This Man's Age?

See if You Can Tell Within 25 Years; the Author Couldn't; But He Stuck With Hobart Bradstreet Until He Revealed His Method of Staying Young

By WILLIAM R. DURGIN

HOBART BRADSTREET, THE MAN WHO DECLINES TO GROW OLD

I USED to pride myself on guessing people's ages. That was before I met Hobart Bradstreet, whose age I missed by a quarter-century. But before I tell you how old he really is, let me say this:

My meeting-up with Bradstreet I count the luckiest day of my life. For while we often hear our minds and bodies are about 50% efficient—and at times feel it to be the truth—he knows *why*. Furthermore, he knows how to overcome it—in five minutes—and he showed me *how*.

This man offers no such bromides as setting-up exercises, deep-breathing or any of those things you know at the outset you'll never do. He uses a principle that is the foundation of all chiropractic, naprapathy, mechano-therapy, and even osteopathy. Only he does not touch a hand to you; it isn't necessary.

The reader will grant Bradstreet's method of staying young worth knowing and using, when told that its originator (whose photograph reproduced here was taken a month ago) is sixty-five years old!

And here is the secret: *he keeps his spine a half-inch longer than it ordinarily would measure.*

Any man or woman who thinks just one-half inch elongation of the spinal column doesn't make a difference should try it! It is easy enough. I'll tell you how. First, though, you may be curious to learn why a full-length spine puts one in an entirely new class physically. The spinal column is a series of tiny bones, between which are pads or cushions of cartilage. Nothing in the ordinary activities of us humans stretches the spine. So it "settles" day by day, until those once soft and resilient pads become thin as a safety-razor blade—and just about as hard. One's spine (the most wonderfully designed shock-absorber known) is then an unyielding column that transmits every shock straight to the base of the brain.

Do you wonder folks have backaches and headaches? That one's nerves pound toward the end of a hard day? Or that a nervous system may periodically go to pieces? For every nerve in one's body connects with the spine, which is a sort of central switchboard. When the "insulation," or cartilage wears down and flattens out, the nerves are exposed, or even impinged—and there is trouble on the line.

Now, for proof that subluxation of the spine causes most of the ills and ailments which spell "age" in men or women. Flex your spine—"shake it out"—and they will disappear. You'll feel the difference in *ten minutes*. At least, I did. It's no trick to secure complete spinal laxation as Bradstreet does it. But like everything else one must know how. No amount of violent exercise will do it; not even chopping wood. As for walking, or golfing, your spine settles down a bit firmer with each step.

Mr. Bradstreet has evolved from his 25-year experience with spinal mechanics a simple, boiled-down formula of just five movements. Neither takes more than one minute, so it means but five minutes a day. But those movements! I never experienced such compound exhilaration before. I was a good subject for the test, for I went into it with a dull headache. At the end of the second movement I thought I could actually feel my blood circulating. The third movement in this remarkable SPINE-MOTION series brought an amazing feeling of exhilaration. One motion seemed to open and shut my backbone like a jack-knife.

I asked about constipation. He gave me another motion—a peculiar, writhing and twisting movement—and fifteen minutes later came a complete evacuation!

Hobart Bradstreet frankly gives the full credit for his conspicuous success to these simple secrets of SPINE-MOTION. He has traveled about for years, conditioning those whose means permitted a specialist at their beck and call. I met him at the Roycroft Inn, at East Aurora. Incidentally, the late Elbert Hubbard and he were great pals; he was often the "Fra's" guest in times past. But Bradstreet, young as he looks and feels, thinks he has chased around the country long enough. He has been prevailed upon to put his SPINE-MOTION method in form that makes it now generally available. It costs nothing to try it!

I know what these remarkable mechanics of the spine have done for me. I have checked up at least twenty-five other cases. With all sincerity I say nothing in the whole realm of medicine or specialism can quicker re-make, rejuvenate and restore one. I wish you could see Bradstreet himself. He is arrogantly healthy; he doesn't seem to have any nerves. Yet he puffs incessantly at a black cigar that would floor some men, drinks two cups of coffee at every meal, and I don't believe he averages seven hours sleep. It shows what a sound nerve-mechanism will do. He says a man's powers can and should be unabated up to the age of 60, in every sense, and I have had some astonishing testimony on that score.

Without any payment whatever, would you like to try this way of "coming back?" Or, if young, and apparently normal in your action and feelings, do you want to see your energies just about doubled? It is easy. No "apparatus" is required. Just Bradstreet's few, simple instructions, made doubly clear by his photographic poses of the five positions. Results come amazingly quick. In less than a week you'll have new health, new appetite, new desire, and new capacities; you'll feel years lifted off mind and body. This miracle-man's method can be tested without any advance payment. If you feel enormously benefited, everything is yours to keep by mailing only $3.00! Knowing something of the fees this man has been accustomed to receiving, I hope his naming $3.00 to the general public will have full appreciation.

The $3.00 which pays for everything is not sent in advance, nor do you make any payment or deposit on delivery. The trial is absolutely *free*. Requests will be answered in turn. Try how it feels to have a full-length spine, and you'll henceforth pity men and women whose nerves are in a vise!

HOBART BRADSTREET, Suite 4634
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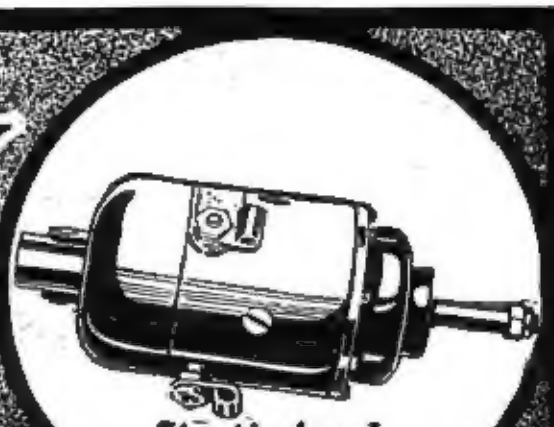

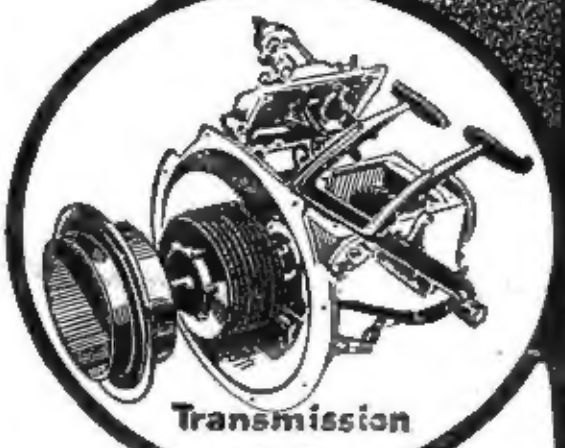

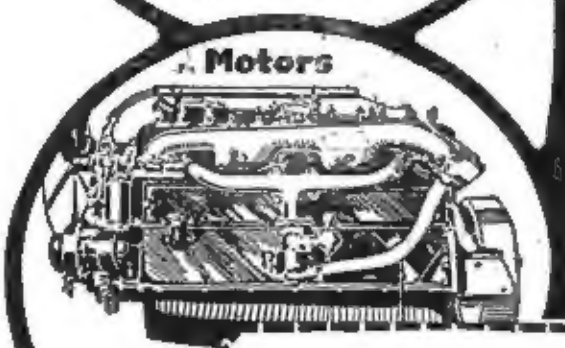

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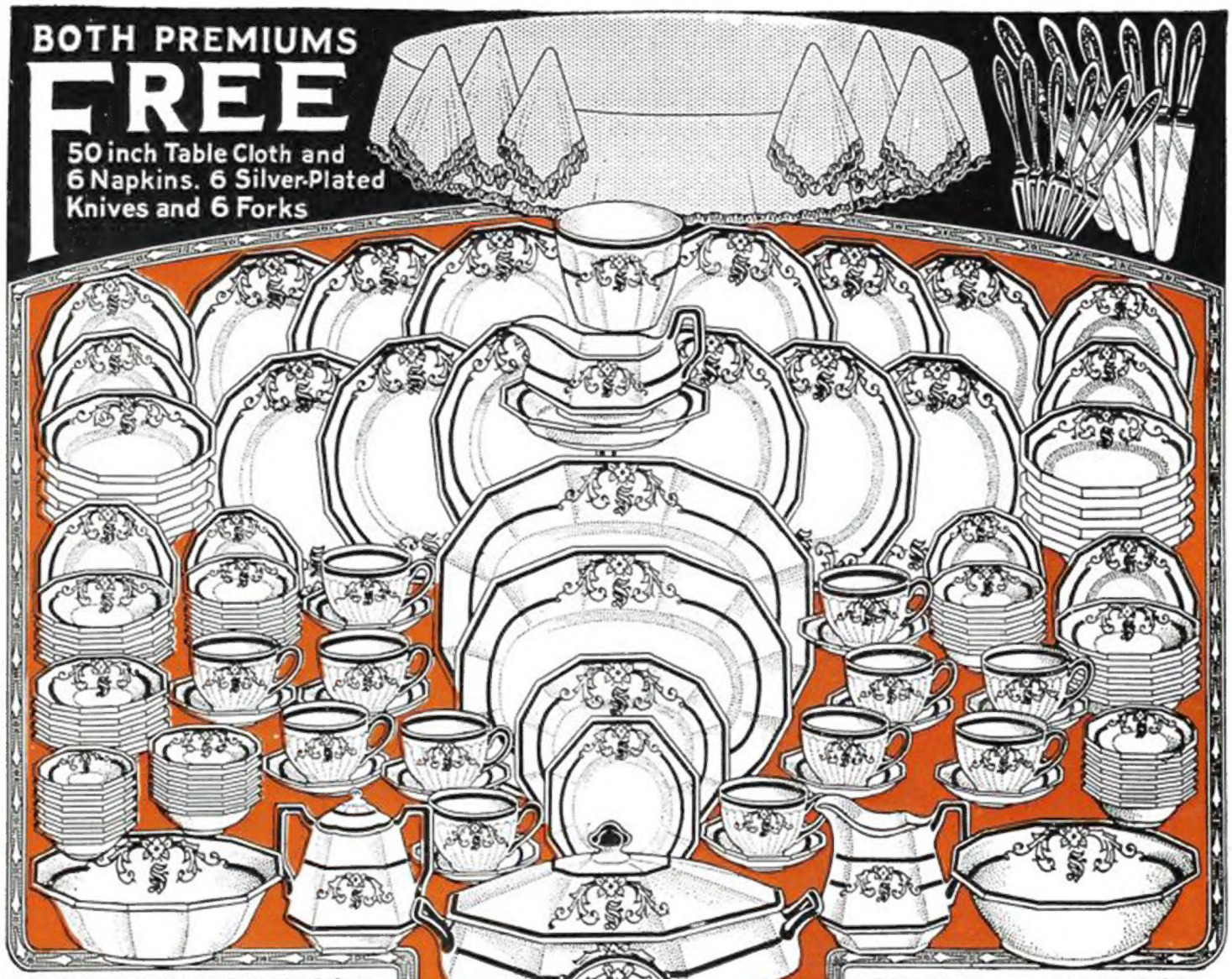

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